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ABSTRACT

This paper categorizes and discusses extracts from Baha'i Education. All extracts come from the writings and talks of Baha'u'llah, Abdu'l-Baha, and Shoghi Effendi. Section 1 discusses the nature and purpose of education, including financing education; discipline, perseverance, and order; purposes and principles of schools; establishment and supervision of schools; obligations of spiritual assemblies; education to advance world welfare; promotion of education; education for girls; education of orphans; parents' roles; compulsory education; and Baha'i education as the foundation of the law of God and the basis for happiness. Section 2 discusses human nature and the prevention of criminal or harmful acts, discipline, and encouragement rather than censure. Section 3 discusses pedagogy and highlights role models, the teacher's status, the teacher's value, the teacher's character and behavior, and prayer for knowledge. Section 4 discusses curriculum, including teaching about God and religion; fear combined with love and justice for controlling behavior; recognition of the manifestation of God; arts, crafts, and science education; criterion of usefulness of academic pursuits; reading and writing skills; auxiliary language education; melodiously reciting words of God; character education; knowledge leading to God; material, human, and spiritual education; developing volition; kindness to animals; universal curriculum for all; love in the curriculum; brief summary of a school curriculum; and balancing mental and spiritual education. Section 5 examines metaphors about education, including teacher as physician, God as educator, children as pearls, parents as teachers, teachers as gardeners, and metaphors about students. (SM)

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Bahá'í Principles of Education

Categorization of and Commentary on Extracts from *Bahá'í Education*

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Bahá'í Principles of Education:

Categorization of and Commentary on Extracts from *Bahá'í Education*

Rodney H. Clarken

What knowledge is most worth knowing and how can it best be taught are questions that have confronted and confounded humankind through the ages. Today's answers differ from yesterday's, and tomorrow's answers will differ from today's. One culture's answers will differ from another culture's. The Bahá'í teachings begin to answer these questions using the unique and insightful guidance they provide. By following this guidance, we can provide the best education for all our children and our communities for both today and tomorrow. This paper serves as an addition and supplement to *Education for a New World* (Clarken, 1998), which can be referred to for additional treatment of some of the topics discussed here.

In an attempt to find principles related to education, quotations from the compilation on Bahá'í education compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice in 1976 have been categorized and briefly introduced below.This compilation has been subsequently published with the title "Bahá'í Education" by several Bahá'í publishing trusts around the world, i.e., Wilmette, IL; London; New Delhi; and Sydney. All extracts come from the writings and talks of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. Quotations numbered 1-28 are from Bahá'u'lláh, 29-106 from the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 107-115 from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks, 116-123 from Shoghi Effendi's writings, and 124-162 are from letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi. All passages have been included except for a small number from the letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, also referred to as the Guardian, which did not add substantively to the areas discussed. Because this paper consists mostly of quotations, the quotations are not italicized or indented as suggested by most writing styles. They are identified by the number that is used in some of the publications.

Though many of these quotations have insights for various areas of education, each quotation has only been used once and is categorized according to the topic that seemed most relevant or useful. Much more work needs to be done with this important topic. May this present effort be of some use to educators in their process of improving education.

This is but one more attempt to further understanding concerning the ever-important topic of education. May it stimulate those who have more talent and insight to produce a more suitable approach to this topic. The following two extracts serve as an introduction and rationale for this work.

130. He is very glad to know that you attach importance to the training of the children, for whatever they learn in that early stage of their development will leave its traces upon their whole life. It becomes part of their nature.

There is no especial book which the Guardian can recommend. It is for the older friends to attempt a compilation that would suit that purpose, and after many attempts a good one will ultimately be produced. . . .

Such stories regarding the life of different Prophets together with Their sayings will also be useful to better understand the literature of the Cause for there is constant reference to them. It is, however, the work of experienced people to bring together such materials and make of them interesting text books for the children.

The Cause will gradually produce people who would answer these needs. It is only a question of time. What we should strive to do is to stimulate different individuals who have the talent to attempt the task.

(October 19, 1932 to an individual believer)

139. You have asked him for detailed information concerning the Bahá'í educational program; there is as yet no such thing as a Bahá'í curriculum, and there are no Bahá'í publications exclusively devoted to this subject, since the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá do not present a definite and detailed educational system, but simply offer certain basic principles and set forth a number of teaching ideals that should guide future Bahá'í educationalists in their efforts to formulate an adequate teaching curriculum which would be in full harmony with the spirit of the Bahá'í Teachings, and would thus meet the requirements and needs of the modern age.

These basic principles are available in the sacred writings of the Cause, and should be carefully studied, and gradually incorporated in various college and university programs. But the task of formulating a system of education which would be officially recognized by the Cause, and enforced as such throughout the Bahá'í world is one which the present-day generation of believers cannot obviously undertake, and which has to be gradually accomplished by Bahá'í scholars and educationalists of the future.

(June 7, 1939 to an individual believer)

Nature and Purpose of Education

Financing Education

Many different methods of financing education exist throughout the world today. The Bahá'í writings offer some suggestions.

7. Unto every father hath been enjoined the instruction of his son and daughter in the art of reading and writing and in all that hath been laid down in the Holy Tablet. He that putteth away that which is commanded unto him, the Trustees are then to take from him that which is required for their instruction, if he be wealthy, and if not the matter devolveth upon the House of Justice. Verily, have We made it a shelter for the poor and needy. He that bringeth up his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My Glory, My loving kindness, My Mercy, that have compassed the world.

(Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, pages 15-16)

8. Everyone, whether man or woman, should hand over to a trusted person a portion of what he or she earneth through trade, agriculture or other occupation, for the training and education of children, to be spent for this purpose with the knowledge of the Trustees of the House of Justice.

(From Tablet of the World, published in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, page 90).

45. And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is the promotion of education. Every child must be instructed in sciences as much as is necessary. If the parents are able to provide the expenses of

this education, it is all right, otherwise the community must provide the means for the teaching of that child.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 227, page 304)

Discipline, Perseverance and Order Needed

Schools should be places of discipline and order. Perseverance is needed to bring about good education.

46. There are certain pillars which have been established as the unshakable supports of the Faith of God. The mightiest of these is learning and the use of the mind, the expansion of consciousness, and insight into the realities of the universe and the hidden mysteries of Almighty God.

To promote knowledge is thus an inescapable duty imposed on every one of the friends of God. It is incumbent upon that Spiritual Assembly, that assemblage of God, to exert every effort to educate the children, so that from infancy they will be trained in Bahá'í conduct and the ways of God, and will, even as young plants, thrive and flourish in the soft-flowing waters that are the counsels and admonitions of the Blessed Beauty. Work then with heart and soul, loose your tongues to further this endeavor, sacrifice your possessions so that the School of 'Ishqábád* will ever advance in discipline and order.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 97, page 126)

*See God Passes by, pages 300, 301, 361

71. O ye the cherished loved ones of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! One of the friends hath sent us a letter regarding the school at 'Ishqábád, to the effect that, praised be God, the friends there are now working hard to get the school in order, and have appointed teachers well qualified for their task, and that from this time forward the greatest care will be devoted to the supervision and management of the school.

It is likewise my hope that the favors and bestowals of God, the bountiful King, will encompass you, so that the friends may come to excel the others in all things.

One of the most important of undertakings is the education of children, for success and prosperity depend upon service to and worship of God, the Holy, the All-Glorified.

Among the greatest of all great services is the education of children, and promotion of the various sciences, crafts and arts. Praised be God, ye are now exerting strenuous efforts toward this end. The more ye persevere in this most important task, the more will ye witness the confirmations of God, to such a degree that ye yourselves will be astonished.

This verily is a matter beyond all doubt, a pledge that shall certainly be redeemed.

104. The Sunday school for the children in which the Tablets and Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are read, and the Word of God is recited for the children is indeed a blessed thing. You must certainly continue this organized activity without cessation, and attach importance to it, so that day by day it may grow and be quickened with the breaths of the Holy Spirit. If this activity is well organized, rest thou assured that it will yield great results. Firmness and steadfastness, however, are necessary, otherwise it will continue for some time, but later be gradually forgotten. Perseverance is an essential condition. In every project firmness and steadfastness will undoubtedly lead to good results; otherwise it will exist for some days, and then be discontinued.

Principles of School

The Bahá'í writings describe the purpose of schools and offer guidelines for their functioning.

74. Make ye every effort to improve the Tarbíyat School** and to develop order and discipline in this institution. Utilize every means to make this School a garden of the All-Merciful, from which the lights of learning will cast their beams, and wherein the children, whether Bahá'í or other, will be educated to such a degree as to become God's gifts to man, and the pride of the human race. Let them make the greatest progress in the shortest span of time, let them open wide their eyes and uncover the inner realities of all things, become proficient in every art and skill, and learn to comprehend the secrets of all things even as they are—this faculty being one of the clearly evident effects of servitude to the Holy Threshold.

It is certain that ye will make every effort to bring this about, and will also draw up plans for the opening of a number of schools. These schools for academic studies must at the same time be training centres in behavior and conduct, and they must favor character and conduct above the sciences and arts. Good behavior and high moral character must come first, for unless the character be trained, acquiring knowledge will only prove injurious. Knowledge is praiseworthy when it is coupled with ethical conduct and a virtuous character; otherwise it is a deadly poison, a frightful danger. A physician of evil character, and who betrayeth his trust, can bring on death, and become the source of numerous infirmities and diseases.

Devote ye the utmost attention to this matter, for the basic, the foundation-principle of a school is first and foremost moral training, character building, and the rectification of conduct.

**The first school owned and operated by the Bahá'í community of Persia, located in Tihrán. See God Passes By, pages 299, 363, 371, 372 for references to the establishment and later forced closure of Bahá'í schools in Persia.

81. As to the organization of the schools: If possible the children should all wear the same kind of clothing, even if the fabric is varied. It is preferable that the fabric as well should be uniform; if however, this is not possible, there is no harm done. The more cleanly the pupils are, the better; they should be immaculate. The school must be located in a place where the air is delicate and pure. The children must be carefully trained to be most courteous and well-behaved. They must be constantly encouraged and made eager to gain all the summits of human accomplishment, so that from their earliest years they will be taught to have high aims, to conduct themselves well, to be chaste, pure, and undefiled, and will learn to be of powerful resolve and firm of purpose in all things. Let them not jest and trifle, but earnestly advance unto their goals, so that in every situation they will be found resolute and firm.

Training in morals and good conduct is far more important than book learning. A child that is cleanly, agreeable, of good character, well-behaved—even though he be ignorant—is preferable to a child that is rude, unwashed, ill-natured, and yet becoming deeply versed in all the sciences and arts. The reason for this is that the child who conducts himself well, even though he be ignorant, is of benefit to others, while an ill-natured, ill-behaved child is corrupted and harmful to others, even though he be learned. If, however, the child be trained to be both learned and good, the result is light upon light.

Children are even as a branch that is fresh and green; they will grow up in whatever way you train them. Take the utmost care to give them high ideals and goals, so that once they come of age, they will cast their beams like brilliant candles on the world, and will not be defiled by lusts and

passions in the way of animals, heedless and unaware, but instead will set their hearts on achieving everlasting honor and acquiring all the excellences of humankind.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 110, pages 135-6)

Schools Must be Established and Supervised

Schools and institutions of higher education must be established so that every person may receive an adequate education.

69. 0 ye recipients of the favors of God! In this new and wondrous Age, the unshakable foundation is the teaching of sciences and arts. According to explicit Holy Texts, every child must be taught crafts and arts, to the degree that is needful. Wherefore, in every city and village, schools must be established and every child in that city or village is to engage in study to the necessary degree.

It followeth that whatever soul shall offer his aid to bring this about will assuredly be accepted at the Heavenly Threshold, and extolled by the Company on high.

Since ye have striven hard toward this all-important end, it is my hope that ye will reap your reward from the Lord of clear tokens and signs, and that the glances of heavenly grace will turn your way.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 109, pages 134-5)

117. They (the Local Spiritual Assemblies) must promote by every means in their power the material, as well as the spiritual, enlightenment of youth, the means for the education of children, institute, whenever possible, Bahá'í educational institutions, organize and supervise their work, and provide the best means for their progress and development.

(March 12,1923 to the Bahá'ís of America, Great Britain, Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy, Japan and Australasia, published in Principles of Bahá'í Administration, page 40)

122. In philanthropic enterprises and acts of charity, in promotion of the general welfare and furtherance of the public good including that of every group without any exception whatever, let the beloved of God attract the favorable attention of all, and lead all the rest.

Let them, freely and without charge, open the doors of their schools and their higher institutions for the study of sciences and the liberals arts, to non-Bahá'í children and youth who are poor and in need.

. . . And next is the propagation of learning and the promulgation of Bahá'í rules of conduct, practices and laws. At this time, when the nation has awakened out of its sleep of negligence, and the Government has begun to consider the promotion and expansion of its educational establishment, let the Bahá'í representatives in that country arise in such a manner that as a result of their high endeavors in every hamlet, village and town, of every province and district, preliminary measures will be taken for the setting up of institutions for the study of sciences, the liberal arts and religion. Let Bahá'í children without any exceptions learn the fundamentals of reading and writing and familiarize themselves with the rules of conduct, the customs, practices and laws as set forth in the Book of God; and let them, in the new branches of knowledge, in the arts and technology of the day, in pure and praiseworthy characteristics, Bahá'í conduct, the Bahá'í way of life—became so distinguished above the rest that all other communities, whether Islamic, Zoroastrian, Christian, Judaic or materialist, will of their own volition and most gladly enter their children in such advanced Bahá'í institutions of learning and entrust them to the care of Bahá'í instructors.

So too is the promotion and execution of the laws set forth in the Book of God.
(January 1929 to the believers of the East—translated from the Persian)

Obligations of Spiritual Assemblies

The Spiritual Assemblies have the responsibility to promote education and establish schools.

121. Among the sacred obligations devolving upon the Spiritual Assemblies is the promotion of learning, the establishing of schools and creation of the necessary academic equipment and facilities for every boy and girl.

Every child without exception must from his earliest years make a thorough study of the art of reading and writing, and according to his own tastes and inclinations and the degree of his capacity and powers, devote extreme diligence to the acquisition of learning, beneficial arts and skills, various languages, speech, and contemporary technology.

To assist the children of the poor in the attainment of these accomplishments, and particularly in learning the basic subjects, is incumbent upon the members of the Spiritual Assemblies, and is accounted as one of the obligations laid upon the conscience of the trustees of God in every land.

'He that bringeth up his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My Glory, My loving-kindness, My Mercy, that have compassed the world.'
(June 8, 1925 to the National Spiritual Assembly of Persia—translated from the Persian)

Education Promotes the Advancement and Welfare of World

The importance of education is emphasized in the Bahá'í writings. It is the cause of advancement, prosperity and well being.

6. We prescribe unto all men that which will lead to the exaltation of the Word of God amongst His servants, and likewise, to the advancement of the world of being and the uplift of souls. To this end, the greatest means is education of the child. To this must each and all hold fast. We have verily laid this charge upon you in manifold Tablets as well as in My Most Holy Book. Well is it with him who deferreth thereto. We ask of God that He will assist each and every one to obey this inescapable command that hath appeared and been caused to descend through the Pen of the Ancient of Days.

36. Observe carefully how education and the arts of civilization bring honor, prosperity, independence and freedom to a government and its people.
(The Secret of Divine Civilization, page 111)

34. Close investigation will show that the primary cause of oppression and injustice, of unrighteousness, irregularity and disorder, is the people's lack religious faith and the fact that they are uneducated. When, for example, the people are genuinely religious and are literate and well-schooled, and a difficulty presents itself, they can apply to the local authorities; if they do not meet with justice and secure their rights and if they see that the conduct of the local government is incompatible with the Divine good pleasure and the king's justice, they can then take their case to higher courts and describe the deviation of the local administration from the spiritual law. Those courts can then send for the local records of the case and in this way justice will be done. At present, however, because of their inadequate schooling, most of the population lack even the

vocabulary to explain what they want.
(The Secret of Divine Civilization, page 18)

Education Must be Promoted

The promotion of education is the most urgent requirement, and the most important of all human endeavors. Education is a vital and essential institution.

35. The primary, the most urgent requirement is the promotion of education. It is inconceivable that any nation should achieve prosperity and success unless this paramount, this fundamental concern is carried forward. The principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples is ignorance. Today the mass of the people are uninformed even as to ordinary affairs, how much less do they grasp the core of the important problems and complex needs of the time.
(The Secret of Divine Civilization, page 109)

70. 0 ye of high resolve and noble aims! Your letter was eloquent, its contents original and sensitively expressed, and it betokened your great and praiseworthy efforts to educate the children, both girls and boys. This is among the most important of all human endeavors. Every possible means of education must be made available to Bahá'í children, tender plants of the Divine garden, for in this consisteth the illumination of humankind.

Praised be God; the friends in 'Ishqábád have laid a solid foundation, an unassailable base. It was in the City of Love* that the first Bahá'í House of Worship was erected; and today in this city the means for the education of children are also being developed, inasmuch as even during the war years this duty was not neglected, and indeed deficiencies were made up for. Now must ye widen the scope of your endeavors and draw up plans to establish schools for higher education, so that the City of Love will become the Bahá'í focal centre for science and the arts. Thanks to the bountiful assistance of the Blessed Beauty, means for this will be provided.

Devote ye particular attention to the school for girls, for the greatness of this wondrous Age will be manifested as a result of progress in the world of women. This is why ye observe that in every land the world of women is on the march, and this is due to the impact of the Most Great Manifestation, and the power of the teachings of God.

Instruction in the schools must begin with instruction in religion. Following religious training, and the binding of the child's heart to the love of God, proceed with his education in the other branches of knowledge.

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*'Ishqábád in the Persian language means "City of Love."

72. O ye true servants of the Lord of Hosts!

The services ye are rendering in support of the Ta'yíd School* merit the highest praise. It is certain that God in His bounty will send down His manifold, heavenly blessings upon you.

The believers are in duty bound to establish schools where children can acquire knowledge, and since these friends have pledged themselves to make sacrifices in this connection, and are contributing to the support of the Ta'yíd School, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in all lowliness and submission offereth thanks and praise to the Kingdom of Mysteries. He asketh that bounties will be sent down unto you, and peace of mind, so that ye may succeed in rendering this most laudable service with ease and joy.

O Thou Provider! These souls are doing good. Make them dear to both worlds, make them the recipients of measureless grace. Thou art the Powerful, Thou art the Able, Thou art the Giver, the Bestower, the Incomparable Lord.

*A Bahá'í school for boys in Hamadán, Persia.

73. O thou who hast arisen to serve the Cause of God with all thy being!

What thou hadst written as to the school is a cause for great rejoicing, and delighteth the heart. The friends one and all were cheered and refreshed by this news.

This school is one of the vital and essential institutions which indeed support and bulwark the edifice of humankind. God willing, it will develop and be perfected along every line. Once this school hath, in every respect, been perfected, once it hath been made to flourish and to surpass all other schools, then, each following the other, more and more schools must be established.

Our meaning is that the friends must direct their attention toward the education, and training of all the children of Persia, so that all of them, having, in the school of true learning, achieved the power of understanding and come to know the inner realities of the universe, will go on to uncover the signs and mysteries of God, a will find themselves illumined by the lights of the knowledge of the Lord, and by His love. This truly is the very best way to educate all peoples.

83. As to the education of children, exert every effort to further this; it is of the utmost importance. So too, the education of girls in all the rules of righteous conduct, that they may grow up with a good character and high standards of behavior. For mothers are the first educators of the child, and every child at the beginning of life is like a fresh and tender branch in his parents' hands. His father and mother can train him in any way they choose.

Education for Girls

As they will become the first educators of children, the education of girls takes precedence over that of boys. Education is a means for women to achieve full equality with men. As such it is very important. Some qualities and virtues to be taught are given.

84. 0 esteemed handmaid! . . . Thou hast written about the girls' school. What was previously written still holdeth true. There can be no improvement unless the girls are brought up in schools and centres of learning, unless they are taught the sciences and other branches of knowledge, and unless they acquire the manifold arts, as necessary, and are divinely trained. For the day will come when these girls will become mothers. Mothers are the first educators of children, who establish virtues in the child's inner nature. They encourage the child to acquire perfections and goodly manners, warn him against unbecoming qualities, and encourage him to show forth resolve, firmness, and endurance under hardship, and to advance on the high road to progress. Due regard for the education of girls is, therefore, necessary. This is a very important subject and it should be administered and organized under the aegis of the Spiritual Assembly.

85. 0 ye handmaids of the Merciful!

The school for girls taketh precedence over the school for boys, for it is incumbent upon the girls of this glorious era to be fully versed in the various branches of knowledge, in sciences and the arts and all the wonders of this pre-eminent time, that they may then educate their children and train them from their earliest days in the ways of perfection.

If, as she ought, the mother possesseth the learning and accomplishments of humankind, her children, like unto angels, will be fostered in all excellence, in right conduct and beauty. Therefore the School for Girls that hath been established in that place must be made the object of the deep concern and high endeavors of the friends. The teachers of that school are handmaids close to the Sacred Threshold, for they are of those who, obedient to the commandments of the Blessed Beauty, have arisen to educate the girl children. The day will come when those children will be mothers, and each one of them in her deep gratitude will offer up prayers and supplications to Almighty God and ask that her teachers will be granted joy and well-being forever, and a high station in the Kingdom of God. Name ye this school the Mawhibat School (The School of Bounty).*

*A Bahá'í school for girls in Hamadán, Persia.

86. O handmaid of the Most High!

Our hearts rejoiced at thy letter concerning a school for girls.**

Praised be God that there is now a school of this type in Tihrán where young maidens can, through His bounty, receive an education and with all vigor acquire the accomplishments of humankind. Ere long will women in every field keep pace with the men.

Until now, in Persia, the means for women's advancement were non-existent. But now, God be thanked, ever since the dawning of the Morn of Salvation, they have been going forward day by day. The hope is that they will take the lead in virtues and attainments, in closeness to the Court of Almighty God, in faith and certitude—and that the women of the East will become the envy of the women of the West.

Praised be God, thou art confirmed in thy service, art exerting every effort in this work and taking great pains; and so, too, the teacher in the school, Miss Lillian Kappes.*** Give her my most affectionate greetings.

**The Tarbíyat School, Tihrán, Persia.
***See Star of the West Vol, XI, No. 19, pages 324-6.

87. O ye daughters of the Kingdom!

In past centuries the girl children of Persia were deprived of all instruction. They had neither school nor academy, no kindly tutor and no teacher. Now in this greatest of centuries the bounty of the All-Bountiful hath encompassed the girls as well, and many schools have been founded in Persia for the education of girl children—but what is missing from them is character training, and this despite the fact that such training is more important than instruction, for it is the primary accomplishment of humankind.

Praised be God, a school for girls hath now been established in Hamadán.**** Ye who are the teachers thereof must devote more of your efforts to character training than instruction, and must raise up your girl children to be modest and chaste, of good character and conduct—and in addition must teach them the various branches of knowledge.

If ye follow this course, the confirmations of the All-Glorious Kingdom, in a great rolling swell, will rise and surge above that school.

My hope is that ye will succeed in this.

****Mawhibat School, Hamadán, Persia.

Education of Orphans

All should have an opportunity for an education, especially those who might otherwise be deprived.

90. In this holy Cause the question of orphans hath the utmost importance. The greatest consideration must be shown towards orphans; they must be taught, trained and educated. The Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, especially, must by all means be given to them as far as is possible.

I supplicate God that thou mayest become a kind parent to orphaned children, quickening them with the fragrances of the Holy Spirit, so that they will attain the age of maturity as true servants of the world of humanity and as bright candles in the assemblage of mankind.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 112, page 138)

91. 0 steadfast in the Covenant!

Your letter hath come and hath occasioned the utmost joy, with its news that, praised be God, in Hamadán a welfare and relief association hath been established I trust that this will become a source of general prosperity and assistance, and that means will be provided to set the hearts of the poor and weak at rest, and to educate the orphans and other children.

The question of training the children and looking after the orphans is extremely important, but most important of all is the education of girl children, for these girls will one day be mothers, and the mother is the first teacher of the child. In whatever way she reareth the child, so will the child become, and the results of that first training will remain with the individual throughout his entire life, and it would be most difficult to alter them. And how can a mother, herself ignorant and untrained, educate her child? It is therefore clear that the education of girls is of far greater consequence than that of boys. This fact is extremely important, and the matter must be seen to with the greatest energy and dedication.

God sayeth in the Qur'án that 'they shall not be equals, those who have knowledge and those who have it not.'* Ignorance is thus utterly to be blamed, whether in male or female; indeed, in the female its harm is greater.

I hope, therefore, that the friends will make strenuous efforts to educate their children, sons and daughters alike. This is verily the truth, and outside the truth there is manifestly naught save perdition.

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*Qur'án 39:12

Role of Parents in Education

The responsibility of parents in the education of their children is great. The mother and father are assigned different duties in training their children. These duties are described, and their importance emphasized.

98. O maid-servants of the Merciful! It is incumbent upon you to train the children from their earliest babyhood! It is incumbent upon you to beautify their morals! It is incumbent upon you to attend to them under all aspects and circumstances, inasmuch as God—glorified and exalted is He!—hath ordained mothers to be the primary trainers of children and infants. This is a great and important affair and a high and exalted position, and it is not allowable to slacken therein at all!

If thou walkest in this right path, thou wouldst become a real mother to the children, both

spiritually and materially.

(Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbás, Vol. III, page 606)

99. Deliver my longing and greetings to the consolation of thine eye* . . . and to thy younger son. . . . Verily I love them both even as a compassionate father loveth his dear children. As to thee, have for them an abundant love and exert thine utmost in training them, so that their being may grow through the milk of the love of God, forasmuch as it is the duty of parents to perfectly and thoroughly train their children.

There are also certain sacred duties on children toward parents, which duties are written in the Book of God, as belonging to God.** The (children's) prosperity in this world and the Kingdom depends upon the good pleasure of parents, and without this they will be in manifest loss.

(Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbás, Vol. II, pages 262-3)

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*"Consolation of thine eye"—idiomatic Persian expression meaning "child."

**In Questions and Answers, an appendix to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh lays upon children the obligation of serving their parents and categorically states that after the recognition of the oneness of God, the most important of all duties for children is to have due regard for the rights of their parents.

100. The father must always endeavor to educate his son and to acquaint him with the heavenly teachings. He must give him advice and exhort him at all times, teach him praiseworthy conduct and character, enable him to receive training at school and to be instructed in such arts and sciences as are deemed useful and necessary. In brief, let him instil into his mind the virtues and perfections of the world of humanity. Above all he should continually call to his mind the remembrance of God so that his throbbing veins and arteries may pulsate with the love of God.

96. Today it is obligatory for the loved ones of God, and their imperative duty, to educate the children in reading, writing, the various branches of knowledge, and the expansion of consciousness, that on all levels they may go forward day by day.

The mother is the first teacher of the child. For children, at the beginning of life, are fresh and tender as a young twig, and can be trained in any fashion you desire. If you rear the child to be straight, he will grow straight, in perfect symmetry. It is clear that the mother is the first teacher and that it is she who establisheth the character and conduct of the child.

Wherefore, O ye loving mothers, know ye that in God's sight, the best of all ways to worship Him is to educate the children and train them in all the perfections of humankind; and no nobler deed than this can be imagined.

101. 0 dear one of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! Be the son of thy father and be the fruit of that tree. Be a son that hath been born of his soul and heart and not only of water and clay. A real son is such one as hath branched from the spiritual part of a man. I ask God that thou mayest be at all times confirmed and strengthened.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 117, page 140)

143. With reference to the question of the training of children; given the emphasis placed by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the necessity for the parents to train their children while still in their tender age, it would seem preferable that they should receive their first training at home at the hand of their mother, rather than be sent to a nursery. Should circumstances, however, compel a Bahá'í mother to adopt the latter course, there can be no objection.**

(November 13, 1940 to an individual believer)

**This advice was given in the case of some mothers who wanted to place their children (ages 2 1/2—3 years) in a nursery school because there were no playmates in the vicinity and because they felt they would not have adequate time for the children for several months after the birth of their babies.

Education is Compulsory

All must receive an education.

114. Bahá'u'lláh has announced that inasmuch as ignorance and lack of education are barriers of separation among mankind, all must receive training and instruction. Through this provision the lack of mutual understanding will be remedied and the unity of mankind furthered and advanced. Universal education is a universal law.
(The Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 300)

123. The Bahá'í Faith . . . advocates compulsory education . . .
(June 17, 1933 to the High Commissioner of Palestine)

115. The education of each child is compulsory. . . . In addition to this widespread education each child must be taught a profession, art, or trade, so that every member of the community will be enabled to earn his own livelihood. Work done in the spirit of service is the highest form of worship.
('Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy, page 78)

Bahá'í Education: Foundation of Law of God and Basis for Happiness

A Bahá'í education is the foundation of the Law of God, and the bedrock of the Faith. It is the basis for human happiness in both this world and the next.

48. My wish is that these children should receive a Bahá'í education, so that they may progress both here and in the Kingdom, and rejoice thy heart.
In a time to come, morals will degenerate to an extreme degree. It is essential that children be reared in the Bahá'í way, that they may find happiness both in this world and the next. If not, they shall be beset by sorrows and troubles, for human happiness is founded upon spiritual behavior.
(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 100, page 127)

49. 0 thou who art enamored of the holy breathings of God!
Child education is a matter of the utmost importance. The infant, while yet a suckling, must receive Bahá'í training, and the loving spirit of Christ and Bahá'u'lláh must be breathed into him, that he may be reared in accord with the verities of the Gospel and the Most Holy Book.

54. 0 ye two servants at the Holy Threshold! We have been greatly cheered and refreshed to know that ye have organized meetings for the education of children.
Whoso is active in those meetings whether as a teacher of the children or a sponsor, will certainly become the recipient of confirmations from the invisible Realm, and endless bounties will compass him about.

With great joy, therefore, encouragement is offered for this highly laudable endeavor, that ye may witness an exceeding great reward.

Await ye the sure and certain confirmations of the All-Merciful.

56. 0 steadfast in the Covenant!

Your letter hath come and imparted great delight, with its word that, praised be God, the youth of the Abhá Paradise are verdant and tender, from showers scattered out of clouds of heavenly grace; that they thrive and flourish in the April rains of heavenly guidance, and are progressing day by day.

It is certain that each and every one of them will grow to be as a banner of guidance, a symbol of the bestowals that come from the Realm of the All-Glorious. They will be sweet-singing nightingales in the gardens of knowledge, gazelles delicate and comely, roaming the plains of the love of God. You must attach the greatest importance to the education of children, for this is the foundation of the Law of God, and the bedrock of the edifice of His Faith.

If it were known how much joy you have imparted through what hath been done for the children, the believers would surely educate all their children in the same way.

Human Nature

If we do not understand human nature, we will not be able to properly help individuals develop along the right lines. Many misconceptions about who we are and how we develop are made clear in the following passages. We all differ as the result of the innate, inherited and acquired character.

38. There are some who imagine that an innate sense of human dignity will prevent man from committing evil actions and ensure his spiritual and material perfection. That is, that an individual who is characterized with natural intelligence, high resolve, and a driving zeal, will, without any consideration for the severe punishments consequent on evil acts, or for the great rewards of righteousness, instinctively refrain from inflicting harm on his fellow men and will hunger and thirst to do good. And yet, if we ponder the lessons of history it will become evident that this very sense of honor and dignity is itself one of the bounties deriving from the instructions of the Prophets of God. We also observe in infants the signs of aggression and lawlessness, and that if a child is deprived of a teacher's instructions his undesirable qualities increase from one moment to the next. It is therefore clear that the emergence of this natural sense of human dignity and honor is the result of education. Secondly, even if We grant for the sake of the argument that instinctive intelligence and an innate moral quality would prevent wrongdoing, it is obvious that individuals so characterized are as rare as the philosopher's stone. An assumption of this sort cannot be validated by mere words, it must be supported by the facts. Let us see what power in creation impels the masses toward righteous aims and deeds!

Aside from this, if that rare individual who does exemplify such a facility should also become an embodiment of the fear of God, it is certain that his strivings toward righteousness would be strongly reinforced.

(The Secret of Divine Civilization, pages 97-8)

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*Cf. Genesis 1:26.

39. As to the differences among human beings and the superiority or inferiority of some individuals to others, the materialists are of two schools of thought: one group is of the opinion that these differences and the superior qualities of some individuals are in-born, and are, as they

would put it, an exigency of nature. According to them, it is obvious that differences within the species are inherent. For example, there are, in nature, different kinds of trees; animals, too, are varied in their nature; even minerals vary naturally among themselves and you have here a quarry filled with stones, there a mine of rubies, translucent and richly red; here a shell with pearl enclosed, there only a bit of clay.

The other school of traditional philosophers holdeth to the view that the differences among individuals and the varying levels of intellects and talents derive from education: for with training, a crooked branch can grow straight, and a barren tree of the desert can be domesticated; it can be grafted and made to bear fruit, which may be bitter, but with time turneth sweet. At first, its fruit may be small; but it will grow large and full of flavor, a delight to the taste.

The strongest proof adduced by the second group is this, that the tribes of Africa are, generally speaking, ignorant and wild, while the civilized peoples of America are, in general, possessed of wisdom and understanding, which proveth that the difference between these two peoples is due to education and experience. Such are the stated views of the philosophers.

The Manifestations of God, on the other hand, affirm that differences are demonstrably and indisputably innate, and that 'We have caused some of you to excel others"* is a proven and inescapable fact. It is certain that human beings are, their very nature, different one from the other. Observe a small group of children, born of the same parents, attending the same school, receiving the same education, living on the same diet: some, becoming well educated, will achieve a high degree of advancement: some will reach a middle level; and some will not prove educable at all. It is therefore clear that the disparity among individuals is due to differences of degree which are innate.

But the Manifestations also consider that training and education demonstrably exert a tremendous influence. If, for example, a child is deprived of schooling he will certainly remain ignorant, and his knowledge will be limited to what he is able find out for himself; but if he is brought to a qualified teacher to study the sciences and arts, he will learn of the discoveries made by thousands of other human beings. Thus education is a guide to those who have gone astray, it maketh the blind to see; it bestoweth judgement on the foolish, and a yield of greatness on the unproductive, it causeth the mute to speak, and turneth the false dawn into the true morning's light; through it the tiny seed will become a towering palm, and the runaway slave, a reigning king.

Thus is it certain that education exerteth an influence, and for this reason the Manifestations of God, the Well-Springs of His mercy, are raised up in the world, that through the breaths of holiness They may educate the human race, and make of the sucking child a strong and valiant man. Through them will the outcasts of the earth become the cherished companions of Heaven, and the portionless receive their due. _____

*Qur'án 17:22

40. Question.—How many kinds of character has man and what is the cause of the differences and varieties in men?

Answer.—He has the innate character, the inherited character, and the acquired character which is gained by education.

With regard to the innate character, although the divine creation is purely good, yet the varieties of natural qualities in man come from the difference of degree; all are excellent, but they are more or less so, according to the degree. So all mankind possess intelligence and capacities, but the intelligence, the capacity and the worthiness of men differ. This is evident.

For example, take a number of children of one family, of one place, of one school, instructed by one teacher, reared on the same food, in the same climate with the same clothing, and studying the same lessons—it is certain that among these children some will be clever in the sciences, some

will be of average ability and some dull. Hence it is clear that in the original nature there exists a difference of degree and varieties of worthiness and capacity. This difference does not imply good or evil but is simply a difference of degree. One has the highest degree, another the medium degree, and another the lowest degree. So man exists; the animal, the plant and the mineral exist also—but the degrees of these four existences vary. What a difference between the existence of man and of the animal! Yet both are existences. It is evident that in existence there are differences of degrees.

The variety of inherited qualities comes from strength and weakness of constitution—that is to say, when the two parents are weak, the children will be weak; if they are strong, the children will be robust. In the same way; purity of blood has a great effect; for the pure germ is like the superior stock which exists in plants and animals. For example, you see that children born from a weak and feeble father and mother will naturally have a feeble constitution and weak nerves; they will be afflicted, and will have neither patience, nor endurance, nor resolution nor perseverance, and will be hasty; for the children inherit the weakness and debility of their parents.

Besides this, an especial blessing is conferred on some families and some generations. Thus it is an especial blessing that from among the descendants of Abraham should have come all the Prophets of the children of Israel. This is a blessing that God has granted to this descent: to Moses from his father and mother, to Christ from his mother's line; also to Muhammad and the Báb, and to all the Prophets and the Holy Manifestations of Israel. The Blessed Beauty is also a lineal descendant of Abraham, for Abraham had other sons besides Ishmael and Isaac who in those days migrated to the lands of Persia and Afghanistan, and the Blessed Beauty is one of their descendants.

Hence it is evident that inherited character also exists, and to such a degree that if the characters are not in conformity with their origin, although they belong physically to that lineage, spiritually they are not considered members of the family, like Canaan,* who is not reckoned as being of the race of Noah.

But the difference of the qualities with regard to culture is very great, for education has great influence. Through education the ignorant become learned, the cowardly become valiant. Through cultivation the crooked branch becomes straight; the acid, bitter fruit of the mountains and woods becomes sweet and delicious; and the five-petalled flower becomes hundred petalled. Through education savage nations become civilized, and even the animals become domesticated. Education must be considered as most important, for as diseases in the world of bodies are extremely contagious, so, in the same way, qualities of spirit and heart are extremely contagious. Education has a universal influence, and the differences caused by it are very great.

Perhaps some one will say that, since the capacity and worthiness of men differ therefore, the difference of capacity certainly causes the difference of characters.**

But this is not so, for capacity is of two kinds: natural capacity and acquired capacity. The first, which is the creation of God, is purely good—in the creation of God there is no evil; but the acquired capacity has become the cause of the appearance of evil. For example, God has created all men in such a manner and has given them such a constitution and such capacities, that they are benefitted by sugar and honey and harmed and destroyed by poison. This nature and constitution is innate, and God has given it equally to all mankind. But man begins little by little to accustom himself to poison by taking a small quantity each day, and gradually increasing it, until he reaches such a point that he cannot live without a gramme of opium every day. The natural capacities are thus completely perverted. Observe how much the natural capacity and constitution can be changed, until by different habits and training they become entirely perverted. One does not criticize vicious people because of their innate capacities and nature, but rather for their acquired capacities and nature.

In creation there is no evil; all is good. Certain qualities and natures innate in some men and apparently blameworthy are not so in reality. For example, from the beginning of his life you can see in a nursing child the signs of greed, of anger and of temper. Then, it may be said, good and evil are innate in the reality of man, and this is contrary to the pure goodness of nature and creation. The answer to this is that greed, which is to ask for something more, is a praiseworthy quality provided that it is used suitably. So if a man is greedy to acquire science and knowledge, or to become compassionate, generous and just, it is most praise- worthy If he exercises his anger and wrath against the bloodthirsty tyrants who are like ferocious beasts, it is very praiseworthy. But if he does not use these qualities in a right way, they are blameworthy.

(Some Answered Questions, pages 199-201, 212-5)

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* Cf. Genesis 9:25

**i.e. therefore people cannot be blamed for character

Prevention of Criminal or Harmful Acts

The writings about the treatment of criminals and the causes of crime offer insights into education. The importance of proper training from infancy is stressed, along with the proper use of reward and punishment.

41. As to the difference between that material civilization now prevailing, and the divine civilization which will be one of the benefits to derive from the House of Justice, it is this: material civilization, through the power of punitive and retaliatory laws, restraineth the people from criminal acts; and notwithstanding this, while laws to retaliate against and punish a man are continually proliferating, as ye can see, no laws exist to reward him.

In all the cities of Europe and America, vast buildings have been erected to serve as jails for the criminals.

Divine civilization, however, so traineth every member of society that no one with the exception of a negligible few, will undertake to commit a crime. There is thus a great difference between the prevention of crime through measures that are violent and retaliatory, and so training the people, and enlightening them, and spiritualizing them, that without any fear of punishment or vengeance to come, they will shun all criminal acts. They will, indeed, look upon the very commission of a crime as a great disgrace and in itself the harshest of punishments. They will become enamored of human perfections, and will consecrate their lives to whatever will bring light to the world and will further those qualities which are acceptable at the Holy Threshold of God.

See then how wide is the difference between material civilization and divine. With force and punishments, material civilization seeketh to restrain the people from mischief, from inflicting harm on society and committing crimes. But in a divine civilization, the individual is so conditioned that with no fear of punishment, he shunneth the perpetration of crimes, seeth the crime itself as the severest of torments, and with alacrity and joy, setteth himself to acquiring the virtues of humankind, to furthering human progress, and to spreading light across the world.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 105, pages 132-3)

42. Among the safeguards of the Holy Faith is the training of children, and this is among the weightiest of principles in all the Divine Teachings. Thus from the very beginning mothers must rear their infants in the cradle of good morals—for it is the mothers who are the first educators—so that, when the child cometh to maturity, he will prove to be endowed with all the virtues and qualities that are worthy of praise.

And further, according to the Divine commandments, every child must learn reading and writing, and acquire such branches of knowledge as are useful and necessary, as well as learning an art or skill. The utmost care must be devoted to these matters; any neglect of them, any failure to act on them, is not permissible.

Observe how many penal institutions, houses of detention and places of torture are made ready to receive the sons of men, the purpose being to prevent them, by punitive measures, from committing terrible crimes—whereas this very torment and punishment only increaseth depravity, and by such means the desired aim cannot be properly achieved. Therefore must the individual be trained from his infancy in such a way that he will never undertake to commit a crime, will, rather, direct all his energies to the acquisition of excellence, and will look upon the very commission of an evil deed as in itself the harshest of all punishments, considering the sinful act itself to be far more grievous than any prison sentence. For it is possible so to train the individual that, although crime may not be completely done away with, still it will become very rare.

The purport is this, that to train the character of humankind is one of the weightiest commandments of God, and the influence of such training is the same as that which the sun exerteth over tree and fruit. Children must be most carefully watched over, protected and trained; in such consisteth true parenthood and parental mercy.

Otherwise, the children will turn into weeds growing wild, and become the cursed, Infernal Tree,* knowing not right from wrong, distinguishing not the highest of human qualities from all that is mean and vile; they will be brought up in vainglory, and will be hated of the Forgiving Lord.

Wherefore doth every child, new-risen in the garden of Heavenly love, require the utmost training and care.

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* The Zaqqúm, Qur'án 37:60, 44:43

Discipline

Some philosophies of education suggest that the best approach is to leave children to develop free from outside influences. The Bahá'í writings recognize that education, training and discipline are needed to help the child properly develop. One of the most challenging and vital responsibilities of a teacher is maintaining a proper atmosphere in the class and developing individual discipline. This topic receives much attention today as educators try to find ways to improve both individual and class behavior. The Bahá'í guidance represents a minority view among those currently in practice, which more closely approximate the type of control 'Abdu'l-Bahá attributes to material civilization. This training is intimately related to character education and addressing the character and conduct parts of the curriculum. The first quote is a good summary of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's advice on discipline. Although it was addressed to mothers, its applicability to teachers is apparent.

97b. Let the mothers consider that whatever concerneth the education of children is of the first importance. Let them put forth every effort in this regard, for when the bough is green and tender it will grow in whatever way ye train it. Therefore is it incumbent upon the mothers to rear their little ones even as a gardener tendeth his young plants. Let them strive by day and by night to establish within their children faith and certitude, the fear of God, the love of the Beloved of the worlds, and all good qualities and traits. Whensoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart; and if the slightest undesirable trait should manifest itself, let her counsel the child and punish him, and use means based on reason, even a slight verbal

chastisement should this be necessary. It is not, however, permissible to strike a child, or vilify him, for the child's character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse.
(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 95, pages 124-5)

152. He is sorry to hear your little boy is not developing satisfactorily; very few children are really bad. They do, however, sometimes have complicated personalities and need very wise handling to enable them to grow into normal, moral, happy adults. If you feel convinced your son will really benefit from going to Father Flanagan's school you could send him there. But in general we should certainly always avoid sending Bahá'í children to orthodox religious schools, especially Catholic, as the children receive the imprint of religious beliefs we as believers know are out-dated and no longer for this age. He will especially pray for the solution of this problem.
(May 30, 1947 to an individual believer)

140. With regard to the statement attributed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and which you have quoted in your letter regarding a 'problem child'; these statements of the Master, however true in their substance, should never be given a literal interpretation. 'Abdu'l-Bahá could have never meant that a child should be left to himself, entirely free. In fact Bahá'í education, just like any other system of education is based on the assumption that there are certain natural deficiencies in every child, no matter how gifted, which his educators, whether his parents, schoolmasters, or his spiritual guides and preceptors should endeavor to remedy. Discipline of some sort, whether physical, moral or intellectual, is indeed indispensable, and no training can be said to be complete and fruitful if it disregards this element. The child when born is far from being perfect. It is not only helpless, but actually is imperfect, and even is naturally inclined towards evil. He should be trained, his natural inclinations harmonized, adjusted and controlled, and if necessary suppressed or regulated, so as to ensure his healthy physical and moral development. Bahá'í parents cannot simply adopt an attitude of non-resistance towards their children, particularly those who are unruly and violent by nature. It is not even sufficient that they should pray on their behalf. Rather they should endeavor to inculcate, gently and patiently, into their youthful minds such principles of moral conduct and initiate them into the principles and teachings of the Cause with such tactful and loving care as would enable them to become 'true sons of God' and develop into loyal and intelligent citizens of His Kingdom. This is the high purpose which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has clearly defined as the chief goal of every education.
(July 9, 1939 to an individual believer)

149. The Guardian, in his remarks to Mrs. Maxwell about parents and children, wives and husbands relations in America meant that there is a tendency in that country for children to be too independent of the wishes of their parents and lacking in the respect due to them.
(July 22, 1943 to an individual believer)

150. Regarding your question about children fighting: the statement of the Master, not to strike back, should not be taken so extremely literally that Bahá'í children must accept to be bullied and thrashed. If they can manage to show a better way of settling disputes than by active self-defense, they should naturally do so.
(May 11, 1945 to an individual believer)

Encouragement Rather Than Censure

The role of praise and encouragement in teaching is a controversial topic. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's guidance on this matter could go far to improving the progress of students in schools, especially those who feel less intelligent.

52. As to thy question regarding the education of children: It behoveth thee to nurture them at the breast of the love of God, and urge them onward to the things of the spirit—that they may turn their faces unto God; that their ways may conform to the rules of good conduct and their character be second to none; that they make their own all the graces and praiseworthy qualities of humankind; that they acquire a sound knowledge of the various branches of learning—so that from the very beginning of life they may become spiritual beings, dwellers in the Kingdom, enamored of the sweet breaths of holiness, and may receive an education religious, spiritual, and of the Heavenly Realm. Verily will I call upon God to grant them a happy outcome in this.
(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 122, page 142)

110. If a pupil is told that his intelligence is less than his fellow-pupils, it is a very great drawback and handicap to progress. He must be encouraged to advance. . . .
(The Promulgation of universal Peace, pages 76-7)

113. The child must not be oppressed or censured because it is undeveloped; it must be patiently trained.
(The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pages 180-1)

134. Shoghi Effendi was deeply saddened to learn from your letter . . . of the rather serious situation which your daughter's conduct and her general attitude towards the Cause have created. . . .

Although he highly deplores this fact, and is fully aware of the bad repercussions which it may have on the Cause, yet he feels that nothing short of your motherly care and love and of the counsels which you and the friends can give her, can effectively remedy this situation. Above all, you should be patient, and confident that your efforts to that end are being sustained and guided through the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh. He is surely hearing your prayers, and will no doubt accept them, and thus hasten the gradual and complete materialization of your hopes and expectations for your daughter and for the Cause.

The Guardian would advise you, therefore, not to take any drastic action with regard to your daughter's attendance at the meetings. . . . For in this way there is much greater chance to reform her character than through force or any other drastic method. Love and kindness have far greater influence than punishment upon the improvement of human character.

The Guardian, therefore, trusts that by this means you will succeed in gradually introducing a fundamental change in your daughter's life, and also in making of her a better and truer believer. He is fervently praying on her behalf that she may fully attain this station.
(January 26, 1935 to an individual believer)

Pedagogy

Throughout the Bahá'í writings, methods of instruction can be inferred from the voluminous material on teaching, especially teaching the Faith. There are also some specific instructions given to educators. It is hard to judge their applicability to general situations, but certainly some guidance

can be extracted from them. Some of the following quotations also address curricular and administrative issues.

77. O steadfast in the Covenant! The method of instruction which ye have established, beginning with proofs of the existence of God and the oneness of God, the mission of the Prophets and Messengers and Their teachings, and the wonders of the universe, is highly suitable. Keep on with this. It is certain that the confirmations of God will attend you. It is also highly praiseworthy to memorize the Tablets, divine verses and sacred traditions.

Ye will surely exert every effort in teaching, and in furthering understanding.

78. As to the children: From the age of five their formal education must begin. That is, during the daytime they should be looked after in a place where there are teachers, and should learn good conduct.

Here they should be taught, in play, some letters and words and a little reading—as is done in certain countries where they fashion letters and words out of sweets and give them to the child. For example, they make an 'a' out of candy and say its name is 'a', or make a candy 'b' and call it 'b', and so on with the rest of the alphabet, giving these to the young child. In this way children will soon learn their letters. . . .

When the children are ready for bed, let the mother read or sing them the Odes of the Blessed Beauty, so that from their earliest years they will be educated by these verses of guidance.

79. 0 thou servant of God! Thou didst ask as to the education of children. Those children who, sheltered by the Blessed Tree, have set foot upon the world, those who are cradled in the Faith and are nurtured at the breast of grace—such must from the beginning receive spiritual training directly from their mothers. That is, the mother must continually call God to mind and make mention of Him, and tell of His greatness, and instill the fear of Him in the child, and rear the child gently, in the way of tenderness, and in extreme cleanliness. Thus from the very beginning of life every child will be refreshed by the gentle waftings of the love of God and will tremble with joy at the sweet scent of heavenly guidance. In this lieth the beginning of the process; it is the essential basis of all the rest.

And when the child hath reached the age where he can make distinctions, let him be placed in a Bahá'í school, in which at the beginning the Holy Texts are recited and religious concepts are taught. At this school the child is to study reading and writing as well as some fundamentals of the various branches of knowledge, such as can be learned by children.

To be specific, at the start the teacher must place a pen in the child's hand, arrange the children in groups, and instruct each group according to its capacity. When the children have, in a given place, been seated in rows, and each holdeth a pen, and each hath a paper before him, and the teacher hath suspended blackboards in front of the children, let him write thereon with his chalk and have the children copy what he hath written. For example, let the teacher write an alif (a) and say, 'This is an alif.' Let the children then copy it and repeat: 'This is an alif.' And so on, till the end of the alphabet. As soon as they properly recognize the letters, let the teacher make combinations of the letters, while the children follow his lead writing the combinations on their paper, until, by this method, they come to recognize all the letters, singly and combined in words. Let the teacher then proceed to writing sentences, while the children copy what he hath written, each on his own sheet of paper. Let the teacher then explain the meaning of the sentence to the children.

And once they have become skilled in the Persian tongue, let the teacher first translate single words and ask the students the meaning of those words. If a pupil hath grasped a little of this, and

hath translated the word, let the teacher praise him; if all the students are unable to accomplish this, let the teacher write the foreign language translation beneath the given word. For example, let him write samá' (heaven) in Arabic, and ask: 'How do we say this in Persian?' If one of the children replieth, 'The Persian translation of this word is ásimán', let the teacher praise and encourage him. If they are unable to answer, let the teacher himself give the translation and write it down, and let the children copy it.

Later, let the teacher ask: 'How do they say this in Russian, or French, or Turkish?' If they know the answer, excellent. If not, let the teacher say, 'In Russian, or French, the translation is thus and so', write the word on the board, and have the children copy it down.

When the children have become skilled in translating single words, let the teacher combine the words into a sentence, write this on the board and ask the children to translate it. If they are unable, let the teacher himself translate the sentence and write down the translation. It would of course be preferable for him to make use of several languages.

In this way, over a short period—that is, three years—the children will, as a result of writing the words down, become fully proficient in a number of languages, and will be able to translate a passage from one language into another. Once they have become skilled in these fundamentals, let them go on to learning the elements of other branches of knowledge, and once they have completed this study, let each one who is able and hath a keen desire for it, enroll in higher institutions of learning and study advanced courses in the sciences and arts.

Not all, however, will be able to engage in these advanced studies. Therefore, such children must be sent to industrial schools where they can also acquire technical skills, and once the child becometh proficient in such a skill, then let consideration be given to the child's own preferences and inclinations. If the child hath a liking for commerce, then let him choose commerce; if for industry, then industry; if for higher education, then the advancement of knowledge; if for some other of the responsibilities of humankind, then that. Let him be placed in that field for which he hath an inclination, a desire and a talent.

But the indispensable basis of all is that he should develop spiritual characteristics and the praiseworthy virtues of humankind. This is the primary consideration. If a person be unlettered, and yet clothed with Divine excellence, and alive in the breaths of the Spirit, that individual will contribute to the welfare of society, and his inability to read and write will do him no harm. And if a person be versed in the arts and every branch of knowledge, and not live a religious life, and not take on the characteristics of God, and not be directed by a pure intent, and be engrossed in the life of the flesh—then he is harm personified, and nothing will come of all his learning and intellectual accomplishments but scandal and torment.

If, however, an individual hath spiritual characteristics, and virtues that shine out, and his purpose in life be spiritual and his inclinations be directed toward God, and he also study other branches of knowledge—then we have light upon light:* his outer being luminous, his private character radiant, his heart sound, his thought elevated, his understanding swift, his rank noble.

Blessed is he who attaineth this exalted station.

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*Qur'án 24:35

107. Among these children many blessed souls will arise, if they be trained according to the Bahá'í Teachings. If a plant is carefully nurtured by a gardener, it will become good, and produce better fruit. These children must be given a good training from their earliest childhood. They must be given a systematic training which will further their development from day to day, in order that they may receive greater insight, so that their spiritual receptivity be broadened. Beginning in childhood they must receive instruction. They cannot be taught through books. Many elementary sciences

must be made clear to them in the nursery; they must learn them in play, in amusement. Most ideas must be taught them through speech, not by book learning. One child must question the other concerning these things, and the other child must give the answer. In this way, they will make great progress. For example, mathematical problems must also be taught in the form of questions and answers. One of the children asks a question and the other must give the answer. Later on, the children will of their own accord speak with each other concerning these same subjects. The children who are at the head of the class must receive premiums. They must be encouraged and when any one of them shows good advancement, for the further development they must be praised and encouraged therein. Even so in Godlike affairs. Oral questions must be asked and the answers must be given orally. They must discuss with each other in this manner.

(The Bahá'í World, Vol. IX, page 543)

130. . . .The Master used to attach much importance to the learning by heart of the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb. During His days it was a usual work of the children of the household to learn Tablets by heart; now, however, those children are grown up and do not have time for such a thing. But the practice is most useful to implant the ideas and spirit those words contain into the minds of children.

With The Dawn Breakers in your possession you could also arrange interesting stories about the early days of the movement which the children would like to hear. There are also stories about the life of Christ, Muhammad and the other Prophets which if told to the children will break down any religious prejudice they may have learned from older people of little understanding.

(October 19, 1932 to an individual believer)

Role Models

'Abdu'l-Bahá is a perfect exemplar. Teachers and others also serve as role models and should be looked to for examples and inspiration.

103. It is incumbent upon the youth to walk in the footsteps of Hakím* and to be trained in his ways, for such important souls as he and his like have now ascended to the Kingdom of Abhá.

The youth must grow and develop and take the place of their fathers, that this abundant grace, in the posterity of each one of the loved ones of God who bore great agonies, may day by day increase, until in the end, it shall yield its fruit on earth and in Heaven.

*One of the distinguished believers of Qazvín.

Station of the Teacher

The importance and high regard afforded teachers is expressed in several ways in the Bahá'í writings. The teacher is the only non-relative that is to be included in the list of persons to receive inheritance. It is helpful for teachers to refer to these passages for the guidance and inspiration to accomplish their difficult and vital task. The teachers have a high station and a high calling. They are to be knowledgable in their subjects taught and in pedagogy, and to be distinguished in character and conduct.

27. O Husayn! O thou Preceptor!

From His Most Great Prison, the countenance of the Ancient of Days is turned towards thee, and He teacheth thee that which will draw thee nigh unto God, the Lord of mankind.

Blessed is that teacher who shall arise to instruct the children, and to guide the people into the pathways of God, the Bestower, the Well-Beloved.

28. Blessed is that teacher who remaineth faithful to the Covenant of God, and occupieth himself with the education of children. For him hath the Supreme Pen inscribed that reward which is revealed in the Most Holy Book.

Blessed, blessed is he!

60. O servant of the Blessed Beauty!

Blessed art thou, since thou art engaged in rendering a service which will make thy face to shine in the Abhá Kingdom, and that is the education and training of children. If one should, in the right way, teach and train the children, he will be performing a service than which none is greater at the Sacred Threshold. According to what we have heard, you are succeeding in this. You must, however, struggle unceasingly to perfect yourself and win ever higher achievements.

At all times, I implore Almighty God to make you the means of illuminating the minds of those children, of bringing their hearts to life and sanctifying their souls.

66. 0 steadfast in the Covenant! In reply to thy letter, I am obliged to be brief. Praise thou God that thou hast succeeded in becoming a teacher of young Bahá'ís, young trees of the Abhá Paradise, and at the same time art able to benefit the other children as well.

According to the explicit divine Text, teaching the children is indispensable and obligatory. It followeth that teachers are servants of the Lord God, since they have arisen to perform this task, which is the same as worship. You must therefore offer praise with every breath, for you are educating your spiritual children.

The spiritual father is greater than the physical one, for the latter bestoweth but this world's life, whereas the former endoweth his child with life everlasting. This is why, in the Law of God, teachers are listed among the heirs.

Now you in reality have acquired all these spiritual children free and gratis, and that is better than having physical children; for such children are not grateful to their fathers, since they feel that the father serveth them because he must—and therefore no matter what he doeth for them, they pay it no mind. Spiritual children, however, are always appreciative of their father's loving-kindness. This verily is out of the grace of thy Lord, the Beneficent.

67. 0 thou who art steadfast in the Covenant! Thou hast exerted strenuous efforts for the education of children and I have been, and am, infinitely pleased with thee. Praise God, thou hast been enabled to serve in this field, and it is certain that the confirmations of the Abhá Kingdom will encompass thee, and thou shalt achieve prosperity and success.

Today the training and education of the believers' children is the pre-eminent goal of the chosen. It is the same as servitude to the Sacred Threshold and waiting upon the Blessed Beauty. Joyously, therefore, canst thou pride thyself on this.

65. Make every effort to acquire the advanced knowledge of the day, and strain every nerve to carry forward the divine civilization. Establish schools that are well organized, and promote the fundamentals of instruction in the various branches of knowledge through teachers who are pure and sanctified, distinguished for their high standards of conduct and general excellence, and strong in faith; educators with a thorough knowledge of sciences and arts.

It is incumbent upon the exalted body of the Hands of the Cause of God to watch over and protect these schools in every way, and see to their requirements, so that all the means of progress will continually be at hand, and the lights of learning will illumine the whole world.

53. O loving friends! Exert every effort to acquire the various branches of knowledge and true understanding. Strain every nerve to achieve both material and spiritual accomplishments.

Encourage the children from their earliest years to master every kind of learning, and make them eager to become skilled in every art—the aim being that through the favoring grace of God, the heart of each one may become even as a mirror disclosing the secrets of the universe, penetrating the innermost reality of all things; and that each may earn worldwide fame in all branches of knowledge, science and the arts.

Certainly, certainly neglect not the education of the children. Rear them to be possessed of spiritual qualities, and be assured of the gifts and favors of the Lord.

93. Thus the husband and wife are brought into affinity, are united and harmonized, even as though they were one person. Through their mutual union, companionship and love great results are produced in the world, both material and spiritual. The spiritual result is the appearance of divine bounties. The material result is the children who are born in the cradle of the love of God, who are nurtured by the breast of the knowledge of God, who are brought up in the bosom of the gift of God, and who are fostered in the lap of the training of God. Such children are those of whom it was said by Christ, "Verily, they are the children of the Kingdom!"

(Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbas, Vol. III, pages 605-6)

Necessity of an Educator

Some philosophers believe that the most ideal condition is to not interfere with the growth and development of the child. The Bahá'í teachings acknowledge the value and necessity of a teacher.

11. There are many things which will, if neglected, be wasted, and come to nothing. How often in this world do we see a child who has lost his parents and who, unless attention is devoted to his education and training, can produce no fruit. And better off dead than alive is he who produceth no fruit.

68. 0 thou teacher of the children of the Kingdom!

Thou hast arisen to perform a service which would justly entitle thee to vaunt thyself over all the teachers on earth. For the teachers of this world make use human education to develop the powers, whether spiritual or material, of humankind, whilst thou art training these young plants in the gardens of God according to the education of Heaven, and art giving them the lessons of the Kingdom.

The result of this kind of teaching will be that it will attract the blessings of God, and make manifest the perfections of man.

Hold thou fast to this kind of teaching, for the fruits of it will be very great. The children must, from their infancy, be raised to be spiritual and godly Bahá'ís. If such be their training, they will remain safe from every test.

44. Were there no educator, all souls would remain savage, and were it not for the teacher, the children would be ignorant creatures.

It is for this reason that, in this new cycle, education and training are recorded in the Book of God as obligatory and not voluntary. That is, it is enjoined upon the father and mother, as a duty, to strive with all effort to train the daughter and the son, to nurse them from the breast of knowledge and to rear them in the bosom of sciences and arts. Should they neglect this matter, they shall be held responsible and worthy for reproach in the presence of the stern Lord.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 98, pages 126-7)

Teacher's Character and Behavior

Of the various ideas that could be drawn from the following extracts, the idea that seems to be the most unique is that of the character and behavior of the teachers having an effect on their students. This point is one which makes the teacher's role as a model to the students more important than the content knowledge they impart, but as the first quote suggests, they should have both.

63. Make ye inquiries as to a woman teacher. She must be extremely modest, even-tempered, forbearing, and well bred, and she must be expert in the English language.

64. O thou spiritual teacher! In thy school, instruct thou God's children in the customs of the Kingdom. Be thou a teacher of love, in a school of unity. Train thou the children of the friends of the Merciful in the rules and ways of His loving-kindness. Tend the young trees of the Abhá Paradise with the welling waters of His grace and peace and joy. Make them to flourish under the downpour of His bounty. Strive with all thy powers that the children may stand out and grow fresh, delicate, and sweet, like the ideal trees in the gardens of Heaven.

All these gifts and bounties depend upon love for the Beauty of the All-Glorious, and on the blessings in the teachings of the Most High, and the spiritual instructions of the Supreme Concourse, and on ecstasy and ardor and diligent pursuit of whatsoever will redound to the eternal honor of the community of man.

92. Thou didst write about the believers' daughters who attend the schools of other faiths. It is true that, while these children do learn a little in such schools, still the character and behavior of the women teachers have an effect on them, and through the inculcation of doubts and ambiguities, the minds of these girls are influenced and changed.

It is incumbent upon the friends to provide a school for Bahá'í girls whose women teachers will educate their pupils according to the teachings of God. There must the girls be taught spiritual ethics and holy ways.

A child is as a young plant: it will grow in whatever way you train it. If you rear it to be truthful, and kind, and righteous, it will grow straight, it will be fresh and tender, and will flourish. But if not, then from faulty training it will grow bent, and stand awry, and there will be no hope of changing it.

Certainly, the women teachers from Europe give instruction in language and scripts, and housekeeping, and embroidery and sewing; but their pupils' character is completely altered, to such a point that the girls no longer care for their mothers, their disposition is spoiled, they misbehave, they become self-satisfied and proud.

Rather, girls ought to be trained in such a manner that from day to day they will become more self-effacing, more humble, and will defer to and obey their parents and forebears, and be a comfort and a solace to all.

94. Consider that if the mother is a believer, the children will become believers too, even if the father denieth the Faith; while, if the mother is not a believer, the children are deprived of faith, even if the father be a believer convinced and firm. Such is the usual outcome, except in rare cases.

For this reason both fathers and mothers must carefully watch over their little daughters and have them thoroughly taught in the schools by highly qualified women teachers, so that they may familiarize themselves with all the sciences and arts and become acquainted with and reared in all that is necessary for human living, and will provide a family with comfort and joy.

It is therefore incumbent upon the Spiritual Assembly of 'Ishqábád to take the lead in this most urgent matter, so that by the grace and favour of God they may establish an institution which will be a source of security and happiness forever and ever.

Prayer for Knowledge

The role of prayer in the accomplishment of any task is explained in the Bahá'í writings. There are several prayers revealed for the education of children and youth. These prayers should assist the teachers in their sacred task. Below is a prayer 'Abdu'l-Bahá revealed as a preamble to one of his tablets.

29. 0 God, O Thou Who hast cast Thy splendor over the luminous realities of men, shedding upon them the resplendent lights of knowledge and guidance, and have chosen them out of all created things for this supernal grace, and hast caused them to encompass all things, to understand their inmost essence, and to disclose their mysteries, bringing them forth out of darkness into the visible world! 'He verily showeth His special mercy to whomsoever He will.'**

O Lord, help Thou Thy loved ones to acquire knowledge and the sciences and arts, and to unravel the secrets that are treasured up in the inmost reality of all created beings. Make them to learn the hidden truths that are written and embedded in the heart of all that is. Make them to be ensigns of guidance amongst all creatures, and piercing rays of the mind shedding forth their light in this, the 'first life.'***

Make them to be leaders unto Thee, guides unto Thy path, runners urging men on to Thy Kingdom.

Thou verily art the Powerful, the Protector, the Potent, the Defender, the Mighty, the Most Generous.

**Qur'án 3:67

***Qur'án 56:62. In a Tablet 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that this is a reference to life in this world as distinct from the next.

Curricula

Teaching about God and Religion

One of the major differences between the Bahá'í conceptions and those popular today is its focus on spiritual concerns and the teaching of religion.

1. The Prophets and Messengers of God have been sent down for the sole purpose of guiding mankind to the straight Path of Truth. The purpose underlying their revelation hath been to educate

all men, that they may, at the hour of death ascend, in the utmost purity and sanctity and with absolute detachment, to the throne of the Most High.

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXXXI, page 156, page 156-7)

12. It is the bounden duty of parents to rear their children to be staunch in faith, the reason being that a child who removeth himself from the religion of God will not act in such a way as to win the good pleasure of his parents and his Lord. For very praiseworthy deed is born out of the light of religion, and lacking this supreme bestowal the child will not turn away from any evil, nor will he draw nigh unto any good.

47. Thou didst write as to the children: From the very beginning, the children must receive divine education and must continually be reminded to remember their God. Let the love of God pervade their inmost being, commingled with their mother's milk.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 99, page 127)

Fear

The element of fear is needed to control behavior, but must be combined with love and based on justice so as not to be injurious. Fear has a role to play in education according to the Bahá'í teachings. In one instance Bahá'u'lláh states the fear of God is the prime factor in education and in another He talks about the elimination of fear as if it is a virtue. I assume the first fear is of God, and the second is of those things not related to God. As the Guardian states that we do not know what will eliminate the second fear referred to by Bahá'u'lláh, we can only surmise as to its meaning and value as related to education.

13. The fear of God hath ever been the prime factor in the education of His creatures. Well is it with them that have attained thereunto!

21. In the treasuries of the knowledge of God there lieth concealed a knowledge* which, when applied, will largely, though not wholly, eliminate fear. This knowledge, however, should be taught from childhood, as it will greatly aid in its elimination.

(Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, page 32)

* When Shoghi Effendi was asked about the 'knowledge' referred to in the above passage, his secretary wrote the following reply on his behalf:

"Unfortunately it would seem that the knowledge 'which could largely eliminate fear' has not been disclosed or identified by Bahá'u'lláh, so we do not know what it is.'" (From a letter dated January 5, 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to Charles S. Krug, published in "Bahá'í News, No. 210, August 1948, page 3).

(Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, page 27)

151. You ask him about the fear of God: perhaps the friends do not realize that the majority of human beings need the element of fear in order to discipline their conduct? Only a relatively very highly evolved soul would always be disciplined by love alone. Fear of punishment, fear of the anger of God if we do evil, are needed to keep people's feet on the right path. Of course we should love God—but we must fear Him in the sense of a child fearing the righteous anger and chastisement of a parent; not cringe before Him as before a tyrant, but know His mercy exceeds

His justice!
(July 26, 1946 to an individual believer)

14. That which is of paramount importance for the children, that which must precede all else, is to teach them the oneness of God and the Laws of God. For lacking this, the fear of God cannot be inculcated, and lacking the fear of God an infinity of odious and abominable actions will spring up, and sentiments will be uttered that transgress all bounds. . . .

The parents must exert every effort to rear their offspring to be religious, for should the children not attain this greatest of adornments, they will not obey their parents, which in a certain sense means that they will not obey God. Indeed, such children will show no consideration to anyone, and will do exactly as they please.

15. Schools must first train the children in the principles of religion, so that the Promise and the Threat recorded in the Books of God, may prevent them from the things forbidden and adorn them with the mantle of the commandments; but this in such a measure that it may not injure the children by resulting in ignorant fanaticism and bigotry.
(From Words of Paradise, published in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, page 68)

161. In explaining the fear of God to children, there is no objection to teaching it as 'Abdu'l-Bahá so often taught everything, in the form of parables. Also the child should be made to understand that we don't fear God because He is cruel, but we fear Him because He is just, and, if we do wrong and deserve to be punished, then in His justice He may see fit to punish us. We must both love God and fear Him.
(February 15, 1957 to some individual believers)

Recognition of the Manifestation

The recognition of the Manifestation of God for this day and the promotion of His teachings is a central concern of a Bahá'í curriculum. This teaching will generally not be found in most curricula today.

2. We have decreed, O people, that the highest and last end of all learning be the recognition of Him Who is the Object of all knowledge.
(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XCVIII, page 198, 199)

5. Bend your minds and wills to the education of the peoples and kindreds of the earth, that haply the dissensions that divide it may, through the power of the Most Great Name, be blotted out from its face, and all mankind become the upholders of one Order, and the inhabitants of one City.
(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CLVI, pages 332-3, 333-4)

Arts, Crafts, and Sciences

Besides the focus on the spiritual reality and religion, the Bahá'í teachings also endorse the more worldly endeavors if they profit society. Religious knowledge addresses our spiritual nature and worldly knowledge addresses our material natures. Arts, crafts, and sciences are specifically mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh as being worthy of learning, as these are seen as conducive to promoting the welfare of the people.

16. Arts, crafts and sciences uplift the world of being, and are conducive to its exaltation. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words. . . .

In truth, knowledge is a veritable treasure for man, and a source of glory, of bounty, of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto him. Happy the man that cleaveth unto it, and woe betide the heedless.

(Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, pages 26-27)

17. The purpose of learning should be the promotion of the welfare of the people, and this can be achieved through crafts. It hath been revealed and is now repeated that the true worth of artists and craftsmen should be appreciated, for they advance the affairs of mankind. Just as the foundations of religion are made firm through the Law of God, the means of livelihood depend upon those who are engaged in arts and crafts. True learning is that which is conducive to the well-being of the world, not to pride and self-conceit, or to tyranny, violence and pillage.

18. We have granted you permission to study such sciences as will benefit you, not those which lead to idle disputes. Better is this for you, did ye but know.

(Kitáb-i-Aqdas)

Criterion of Usefulness

The important criterion that Bahá'u'lláh applies to any academic pursuit, and which can be used by in selecting what should be taught or learned, is its value to the individual and society. A relationship of this to eliminating lawlessness is suggested.

19. The learned of the day must direct the people to acquire those branches of knowledge which are of use, that both the learned themselves and the generality of mankind may derive benefits therefrom. Such academic pursuits as begin and end in words alone have never been and will never be of any worth. The majority of Persia's learned doctors devote all their lives to the study of a philosophy the ultimate yield of which is nothing but words.

(From Tablet of Maqsúd, published in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, page 169)

25. At the outset of every endeavor, it is incumbent to look to the end of it. Of all the arts and sciences, set the children to studying those which will result in advantage to man, will ensure his progress and elevate his rank. Thus the noisome odors of lawlessness will be dispelled, and thus through the high endeavors of the nation's leaders, all will live cradled, secure and in peace. . . .

The Great Being saith: The man of consummate learning and the sage endowed with penetrating wisdom are the two eyes to the body of mankind. God willing the earth shall never be deprived of these two greatest gifts.

(From Tablet of Maqsúd, published in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, pages 168-171)

Reading and Writing

Bahá'u'lláh's references to reading and writing, widely considered as basic skills in education, takes on a different flavor from the arts, crafts and sciences. Children should try to learn to read and write, but writing skills may only need to be developed according to its projected value to the individual's pursuits. Reading and writing are referred to as arts, not skills, as is common today. It also seems that Bahá'u'lláh's last statement supports the specialization of individuals to achieve the highest perfection.

'Abdu'l-Bahá states that it is essential that all be able to read and write. The passage below also seems to suggest that reading and writing are fundamentals of knowledge. The Guardian also states that reading and writing must be taught: "Every child without exception must from his earliest years make a thorough study of the art of reading and writing." (#121)

Mathematics or computation is not accorded the same importance that reading and writing. Most curricula today consider it a basic skill on a level comparable to reading and writing. It may be assumed that mathematics will be needed to pursue a livelihood and that the amount of mathematics needed will be dependent on different individual's needs.

20. It is incumbent upon the children to exert themselves to the utmost in acquiring the art of reading and writing. Writing skills that will provide for urgent needs will be enough for some; and then it is better and more fitting that they should spend their time in studying those branches of knowledge which are of use.

As for what the Supreme Pen hath previously set down, the reason is that in every art and skill, God loveth the highest perfection.

76. O steadfast in the Covenant! God be praised that ye have succeeded in establishing a school in Mihdíyábád* and are, with great energy and enthusiasm, engaged in educating the children.

In this new and wondrous Cause, the advancement of all branches of knowledge is a fixed and vital principle, and the friends, one and all, are obligated to make every effort toward this end, so that the Cause of the Manifest Light may be spread abroad, and that every child, according to his need, will receive his share of the sciences and arts—until not even a single peasant's child will be found who is completely devoid of schooling.

It is essential that the fundamentals of knowledge be taught; essential that all should be able to read and write. Wherefore is this new institution most worthy of praise, and its program to be encouraged. The hope is that other villages will take you for a model, and that in every village where there is a certain number of believers, a school will be founded where the children can study reading, writing, and basic knowledge.

This is what bringeth joy to the heart of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, cheer and peace to His soul.

*A village near the city of Yazd in Persia.

Auxiliary Language

Another curricular requirement that Bahá'u'lláh includes that will not be found in any existing curricula is the teaching of an international language. This language has not yet been selected, so

this requirement cannot be included, but the spirit of it can be addressed by trying to learn a language that would best promote the goals outlined by Bahá'u'lláh.

22. It beseemeth . . . the . . . officials of the Government to convene a gathering and choose one of the diverse languages, and likewise one of the existing scripts, or else to create a new language and a new script to be taught children in schools throughout the world. They would, in this way, be acquiring only two languages, one their own native tongue, the other the language in which all peoples of world would converse. Were men to take fast hold on that which hath been mentioned, the whole earth would come to be regarded as one country, and people would be relieved and freed from the necessity of acquiring and teaching different languages.
(Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, page 138)

Melodiously Reciting Words of God

Bahá'u'lláh prescribes the melodious recitation of the Words of God. Both recitation and religion are currently in general disfavor in schools, so reciting Bahá'í verses will certainly be a new addition to most curricula. This may form the foundation of the music education of children.

23. Teach unto your children the words that have been sent down from God, that; they may recite them in the sweetest of tones. This standeth revealed in a mighty Book.

24. Teach your children that which hath been sent down from the heaven of majesty and power that they may recite the Tablets of the Merciful in the halls of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs in most melodious tones.
(Kitáb-i-Aqdas)

88. . . . 'Abdu'l-Bahá's supreme joy is in observing that a number of leaves from among the handmaidens of the Blessed Beauty have been educated. that they are the essence of detachment, and are well-informed of the mysteries of the world of being; that they raise such a call in their glorification and praise of the Greatest Name as to cause the inmates of the Fanes of the Kingdom to become attracted and overjoyed, and that they recite prayers in prose and poetry, and melodiously chant the divine verses. I cherish the hope that thou wilt be one of them, wilt cast forth pearls, wilt be constantly engaged in singing His praise and wilt intone celestial strains in glorification of His attributes.

Character Education

Bahá'u'lláh accords morals, character or values a central place in the curriculum. His guidance concerning the teaching of religion and the importance of pursuing studies of worth to humanity is an example of this concern. He also identifies a number of specific attributes that should be taught to children. His writings are replete with numerous other virtues that should be taught in schools.

'Abdu'l-Bahá further emphasizes the role of character education, suggesting that its lack is the root cause of wrongdoing. This passage, one of the clearest and strongest on character education that is currently translated into English in the Bahá'í writings, offers many ideas worthy of further exploration. He suggests that the tools of perception and knowledge are vital to eliminating ignorance, that fear plays a role, that the standard is higher than popularly accepted and that character education is much more important than currently regarded in schools. The guidance given

on human nature and the role of education in developing the character contains many insights that will that will need to be further explored by educators and psychologists.

26. As to the children: We have directed that in the beginning they should be trained in the observances and laws of religion, and thereafter, in such branches of knowledge as are of benefit, and in commercial pursuits that are distinguished for integrity, and in deeds that will further the victory of God's Cause or will attract some outcome which will draw the believer closer to his Lord.

We beg of God to assist the children of His loved ones and adorn them with wisdom, good conduct, integrity and righteousness.

He, verily, is the Forgiving, the Clement.

43. The root cause of wrongdoing is ignorance, and we must therefore hold fast to the tools of perception and knowledge. Good character must be taught. Light must be spread afar, so that, in the school of humanity, all may acquire the heavenly characteristics of the spirit, and see for themselves beyond any doubt that there is no fiercer Hell, no more fiery abyss, than to possess a character that is evil and unsound; no more darksome pit nor loathsome torment than to show forth qualities which deserve to be condemned.

The individual must be educated to such a high degree that he would rather have his throat cut than tell a lie, and would think it easier to be slashed with a sword or pierced with a spear than to utter calumny or be carried away by wrath.

Thus will be kindled the sense of human dignity and pride, to burn away the reapings of lustful appetites. Then will each one of God's beloved shine out as a bright moon with qualities of the spirit, and the relationship of each to the Sacred Threshold of his Lord will not be illusory but sound and real, will be as the very foundation of the building, not some embellishment on its facade.

It followeth that the children's school must be a place of utmost discipline and order, that instruction must be thorough, and provision must be made for the rectification and refinement of character; so that, in his earliest years, within the very essence of the child, the divine foundation will be laid and the structure of holiness raised up.

Know that this matter of instruction, of character rectification and refinement, of heartening and encouraging the child, is of the utmost importance, for such are basic principles of God.

Thus, if God will, out of these spiritual schools illumined children will arise, adorned with all the fairest virtues of humankind, and will shed their light not only across Persia, but around the world.

It is extremely difficult to teach the individual and refine his character once puberty is passed. By then, as experience hath shown, even if every effort be exerted to modify some tendency of his, it all availeth nothing. He may, perhaps, improve somewhat today; but let a few days pass and he forgetteth, and turneth backward to his habitual condition and accustomed ways. Therefore it is in early childhood that a firm foundation must be laid. While the branch is green and tender it can easily be made straight.

Our meaning is that qualities of the spirit are the basic and divine foundation, and adorn the true essence of man; and knowledge is the cause of human progress. The beloved of God must attach great importance to this matter, and carry it forward with enthusiasm and zeal.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 111, pages 136-7)

Knowledge Should Lead to God

Not only is recognition of God the goal of all knowledge, but it becomes a condition by which to weigh other knowledge.

31. 0 thou true friend! Read, in the school of God, the lessons of the spirit, and learn from love's Teacher the innermost truths. Seek out the secrets of Heaven, and tell of the overflowing grace and favour of God.

Although to acquire the sciences and arts is the greatest glory of mankind, this is so only on condition that man's river flow into the mighty Sea, and draw from God's ancient source His inspiration. When this cometh to pass, then every teacher is a shoreless ocean, every pupil a prodigal fountain of knowledge. If, then, the pursuit of knowledge lead to the beauty of Him Who is the Object of all Knowledge, how excellent that goal; but if not, a mere drop will perhaps shut a man off from flooding grace, for with learning cometh arrogance and pride, and it bringeth on error and indifference to God.

The sciences of this world are bridges to reality; if then they lead not to reality, naught remains but fruitless illusion. By the one true God! If learning be not a means of access to Him, the Most Manifest, it is nothing but evident loss.

It is incumbent upon thee to acquire the various branches of knowledge, and to turn thy face towards the beauty of the Manifest Beauty, that thou mayest be a sign of saving guidance amongst the peoples of the world, and a focal centre of understanding in this sphere from which the wise and their wisdom are shut out, except for those who set foot in the Kingdom of lights and become informed of the veiled and hidden mystery, the well-guarded secret.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, page 72, page 110)

Three Kinds of Education

The Bahá'í writings suggests categorizing education, learning and knowledge according to their material, human and spiritual aspects, and makes clear that education, in order to be comprehensive, should address all three aspects. 'Abdu'l-Bahá also gives guidance on the role of the educator for these three aspects.

37. But education is of three kinds: material, human and spiritual. Material education is concerned with the progress and development of the body, through gaining its sustenance, its material comfort and ease. This education is common to animals and man.

Human education signifies civilization and progress: that is to say, government, administration, charitable works, trades, arts and handicrafts, sciences, great inventions and discoveries, and elaborate institutions, which are the activities essential to man as distinguished from the animal.

Divine education is that of the Kingdom of God: it consists in acquiring divine perfections, and this is true education; for in this state man becomes the focus of divine blessings, the manifestation of the words, "Let Us make man in Our image and after Our likeness." This is the goal of the world of humanity.

Now we need an educator who will be at the same time a material, human and spiritual educator, and whose authority will be effective in all conditions. So if any one should say, "I possess perfect comprehension and intelligence, and I have no need of such an educator," he would be denying that which is clear and evident, as though a child should say, "I have no need of education; I will act according to my reason and intelligence, and so I shall attain the perfections of

existence;" or as though the blind should say, "I am in no need of sight, because many other blind people exist without difficulty."

Then it is plain and evident that man needs an educator, and this educator must be unquestionably and indubitably perfect in all respects, and distinguished above all men. Otherwise, if he should be like the rest of humanity, he could not be their educator, more particularly because he must be at the same time their material and human as well as their spiritual educator—that is to say, he must teach men to organize and carry out physical matters, and to form a social order in order to establish cooperation and mutual aid in living so that material affairs may be organized and regulated for any circumstances that may occur. In the same way he must establish human education—that is to say, he must educate intelligence and thought in such a way that they may attain complete development, so that knowledge and science may increase, and the reality of things, the mysteries of beings and the properties of existence may be discovered; that, day by day instructions, inventions and institutions may be improved; and from things perceptible to the senses conclusions as to intellectual things may be deduced.

He must also impart spiritual education, so that intelligence and comprehension may penetrate the metaphysical world, and may receive benefit from the sanctifying breeze of the Holy Spirit, and may enter into relationship with the Supreme Concourse. He must so educate the human reality that it may become the centre of the divine appearance, to such a degree that the attributes and the names of God shall be resplendent in the mirror of the reality of man, and the holy verse "We will make man in Our image and likeness" shall be realized.*

(Some Answered Questions, pages 8-9, 8-9)

128. Your short but impressive letter addressed to Shoghi Effendi was received. He perused it with deep interest and charged me to thank you on his behalf and to express his fondest hopes that you will pursue with an abiding zeal your academic studies. Being a Bahá'í you are certainly aware of the fact that Bahá'u'lláh considered education as one of the most fundamental factors of a true civilization—this education, however, in order to be adequate and fruitful should be comprehensive in nature and should take into consideration not only the physical and the intellectual side of man but also his spiritual and ethical aspects. This should be the program of the Bahá'í youth all over the world.

(July 9, 1931 to an individual believer)

Developing Volition

Teaching resolve, perseverance and other related character traits is prescribed in a Bahá'í curriculum. 'Abdu'l-Bahá seems to suggest that by teaching those things that several praiseworthy outcomes will result.

97a. 0 Handmaids of the Lord! The spiritual assemblage that ye established in that illumined city is most propitious. Ye have made great strides; ye have surpassed the others, have arisen to serve the Holy Threshold, and have won heavenly bestowals. Now with all spiritual zeal must ye gather in that enlightened assemblage and recite the Holy Writings and engage in remembering the Lord. Set ye forth His arguments and proofs. Work ye for the guidance of the women in that land, teach the young girls and the children, so that the mothers may educate their little ones from their earliest days, thoroughly train them, rear them to have goodly character and good morals, guide them to all the virtues of humankind prevent the development of any behaviour that would be worthy of blame, and foster them in the embrace of Bahá'í education. Thus shall these tender infants be nurtured at the breast of the knowledge of God and His love. Thus shall they grow and flourish,

and be taught righteousness and the dignity of humankind, resolution and the will to strive and to endure. Thus shall they learn perseverance in all things, the will to advance, high mindedness and high resolve, chastity and purity of life. Thus shall they be enabled to carry to a successful conclusion whatsoever they undertake.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 95, pages 124-5)

Kindness to Animals

'Abdu'l-Bahá's recommends teaching children to be kind to animals. This guidance could also be applied to a person who needs education.

108. Educate the children in their infancy in such a way that they may become exceedingly kind and merciful to the animals. If an animal is sick they should endeavor to cure it; if it is hungry, they should feed it; if it is thirsty, they should satisfy its thirst; if it is tired, they should give it rest.

Man is generally sinful and the animal is innocent; unquestionably one must be more kind and merciful to the innocent. The harmful animals, such as the bloodthirsty wolf, the poisonous snake and other injurious animals are excepted, because mercy towards these is cruelty to man, and other animals.

(The Bahá'í World, Vol. IX, page 544)

Universal Curriculum for All

Equality of opportunity is a fundamental right promoted in the Bahá'í teachings. The need for equality of education as a fundamental aspect of unity, peace, communications and opportunity 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that boys and girls must follow the same curriculum. This guidance might also be applied to other group differences such as geographic location, race and class.

112. He promulgated the adoption of the same course of education for man and woman. Daughters and sons must follow the same curriculum of study, thereby promoting unity of the sexes. When all mankind shall receive the same opportunity of education and the equality of men and women be realized, the foundations of war will be utterly destroyed. Without equality this will be impossible because all differences and distinction are conducive to discord and strife. Equality between men and women is conducive to the abolition of warfare for the reason that women will never be willing to sanction it. Mothers will not give their sons as sacrifices upon the battlefield after twenty years of anxiety and loving devotion in rearing them from infancy, no matter what cause they are called upon to defend. There is no doubt that when women obtain equality of rights war will entirely cease among mankind.

(The Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 175)

89. . . . The establishment of a women's assemblage for the promotion of knowledge is entirely acceptable, but discussions must be confined to educational matters. It should be done in such a way that differences will, day by day, be entirely wiped out, not that, God forbid, it will end in argumentation between men and women. Like the question of the veil, nothing should be done contrary to wisdom. The individual women should, today, follow a course of action which will be the cause of eternal glory to all womankind, so that all women will be illumined. And that lieth in gathering to learn how to teach, in holding meetings to recite the verses, to offer supplications to the kingdom of the Lord of evident signs, and to institute education for the girls.

82. Bahá'u'lláh hath proclaimed the universality of education, which is essential to the unity of mankind, that one and all may be equally educated, whether girls or boys, and receive the same education. When education is universalized in all schools, perfect communication between the members of the human race will be established. When all receive the same kind of education the foundations of war and contention will be utterly destroyed.

Love in the Curriculum

'Abdu'l-Bahá says "Be thou a teacher of love, in a school of unity. Train thou the children of the friends of the Merciful in the rules and ways of His loving-kindness" (64). In several passages he alludes to what that means, but this area will need further exploration, especially as it is new to most curricula.

61. It is the hope of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that those youthful souls in the schoolroom of the deeper knowledge will be tended by one who traineth them to love. May they all, throughout the reaches of the spirit, learn well of the hidden mysteries; so well that in the Kingdom of the All-Glorious, each one of them, even as a nightingale endowed with speech, will cry out the secrets of the Heavenly Realm, and like unto a longing lover pour forth his sore need and utter want of the Beloved.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 107, page 134)

Brief Summary of a School Curriculum

'Abdu'l-Bahá gives a brief outline of what is recommended to be taught in a school. It is one of the most concise and complete descriptions in the Bahá'í writings. Another standard for measuring the worth of any lesson or curricular offering is given--does it further the acquisition of human perfections. The second quotation is addressed to a group of women preparing to educate their girls in Persia. Elsewhere 'Abdu'l-Bahá prescribes the same curriculum for both boys and girls, but recognizing the role girls will likely play as the trainers of their own children, some special training is recommended. These guidelines are instructive for those interested in trying to apply this guidance to general education. Elsewhere (#121), Shoghi Effendi adds two areas that have not been specifically mentioned to the list of areas to be taught: speech and contemporary technology.

80. The subjects to be taught in children's schools are many, and for lack of time We can touch on only a few: First and most important is training in behavior and good character; the rectification of qualities; arousing the desire to become accomplished and acquire perfections, and to cleave unto the religion of God and stand firm in His Laws, to accord total obedience to every just government, to show forth loyalty and trustworthiness to the ruler of the time, to be well wishers of mankind, to be kind to all.

And further, as well as in the ideals of character, instruction in such arts and sciences as are of benefit, and in foreign tongues. Also the repeating of prayers for the well-being of ruler and ruled; and the avoidance of materialistic works that are current among those who see only natural causation, and tales of love, and books that arouse the passions.

To sum up, let all the lessons be entirely devoted to the acquisition of human perfections.

Here, then, in brief are directions for the curriculum of these schools.

95. O handmaids of the Beauty of Abhá!

Your letter hath come, and its perusal brought great joy. Praised be God, the women believers have organized meetings where they will learn how to teach the Faith, will spread the sweet savours of the Teachings and make plans for training the children.

This gathering must be completely spiritual. That is, the discussions must be confined to marshalling clear and conclusive proofs that the Sun of Truth hath indeed arisen. And further, those present should concern themselves with every means of training the girl children; with teaching the various branches of knowledge, good behaviour, a proper way of life, the cultivation of a good character, chastity and constancy, perseverance, strength, determination, firmness of purpose; with household management, the education of children, and whatever especially applieth to the needs of girls—to the end that these girls, reared in the stronghold of all perfections, and with the protection of a goodly character, will, when they themselves become mothers, bring up their children from earliest infancy to have a good character and conduct themselves well.

Let them also study whatever will nurture the health of the body and its physical soundness, and how to guard their children from disease.

When matters are thus well arranged, every child will become a peerless plant in the gardens of the Abhá Paradise.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 94, pages 123-4)

51. We have previously written and sent out a detailed letter regarding the education of children in faith, certitude, learning and spiritual knowledge, and their being taught to call upon the Heavenly Kingdom with suppliant hearts.

It is certain that ye will exert every effort toward this end.

62. O thou handmaid of God! Do thou establish a heavenly school and be thou a teacher in that house of learning. Educate the children in the things of God; and, even as pearls, rear them in the heart of the shell of divine guidance.

Strive thou with heart and soul; see to it that the children are raised up to embody the highest perfections of humankind, to such a degree that every one of them will be trained in the use of the mind, in acquiring knowledge, in humility and lowliness, in dignity, in ardor and love.

119. A basic and vital requirement of these days is the matter of educating the boys and girls. One of the duties devolving upon the members of Spiritual Assemblies is that, with the support of the friends, they should exert all their powers to establish schools for the instruction of boys and girls in the things of the spirit, the fundamentals of teaching the Faith, reading the Sacred Writings, learning the history of the Faith, the secular branches of knowledge, the various arts and skills, and the different languages—so that Bahá'í methods of instruction will become so widely known that children from every level of society will seek to acquire divine teachings as well as secular knowledge in Bahá'í schools, and thereby means for the promotion of the Cause of God will be provided.

(December 19, 1923 to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tihrán, Irán —translated from the Persian)

Balance Mental and Spiritual

The Bahá'í writings make clear the importance of spiritual education, especially for young children, but a letter written on behalf of the Guardian also stresses the importance of mental training and education in colleges of high standing.

127. We had heard through various channels the wonderful way your children had grown to speak about the Cause in public. Shoghi Effendi's hope is that they will, the three of them, become able and devoted speakers on the Cause and subjects akin to it. To do this properly they will need a firm foundation of scientific and literary training which fortunately they are obtaining. It is just as important for the Bahá'í young boys and girls to become properly educated in colleges of high standing as it is to be spiritually developed. The mental as well as the spiritual side of the youth has to be developed before he can serve the Cause efficiently.

Metaphors about Education

The metaphors used in the Bahá'í writings have tremendous explanatory power. The metaphors we use become so much a part of our way of seeing things that we often fail to think very deeply about their implications. Some of the dominant metaphors used in the Bahá'í writings related to educators and students are shared below.

Teacher as Physician

There are several metaphors used in the following quote, as well as a number of potentially very useful allusions. The first paragraph uses the gardener as teacher and plants as students analogy, the second that of doctor to teacher. The third paragraph describes the transformation that can result from education in opposites, such as demons to angels. The fourth and fifth paragraphs use descriptive language to describe human potentialities and the positive role that education can play.

58. The education and training of children is among the most meritorious acts of humankind and draweth down the grace and favor of the All-Merciful, for education is the indispensable foundation of all human excellence and alloweth man to work his way to the heights of abiding glory. If a child be trained from his infancy, he will, through the loving care of the Holy Gardener, drink in the crystal waters of the spirit and of knowledge, like a young tree amid the rilling brooks. And certainly he will gather to himself the bright rays of the Sun of Truth, and through its light and heat will grow ever fresh and fair in the garden of life.

Therefore must the mentor be a doctor as well: that is, he must, in instructing the child, remedy its faults; must give him learning, and at the same time rear him to have a spiritual nature. Let the teacher be a doctor to the character of the child, thus will he heal the spiritual ailments of the children of men.

If, in this momentous task, a mighty effort be exerted, the world of humanity will shine out with other adornings, and shed the fairest light. Then will this darksome place grow luminous, and this abode of earth turn into Heaven. The very demons will change to angels then, and wolves to shepherds of the flock, and the wild-dog pack to gazelles that pasture on the plains of oneness, and ravening beasts to peaceful herds; and birds of prey, with talons sharp as knives, to songsters warbling their sweet native notes.

For the inner reality of man is a demarcation line between the shadow and the light, a place where the two seas meet;* it is the lowest point on the arc of descent,** and therefore is it capable of gaining all the grades above. With education it can achieve all excellence; devoid of education it will stay on, at the lowest point of imperfection.

Every child is potentially the light of the world—and at the same time its darkness; wherefore must the question of education be accounted as of primary importance. From his infancy, the child must be nursed at the breast of God's love, and nurtured in the embrace of His knowledge, that he

may radiate light, grow in spirituality, be filled with wisdom and learning, and take on the characteristics of the angelic host. Since ye have been assigned to this holy task, ye must therefore exert every effort to make that school famed in all respects throughout the world; to make it the cause of exalting the Word of the Lord.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 103, pages 130-1)

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*Qur'án 25:55, 35:13, 55:19-25. See also Marriage Prayer revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá beginning "He is God! O peerless Lord! In Thine almighty wisdom Thou hast enjoined marriage upon the peoples. . . ."

**See Some Answered Questions, pages 2667, 285-6 for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's comments on the arc of descent and ascent.

God as Educator

One of the great metaphors we can look to for inspiration and guidance, is the Godhead or the Manifestation as educator. They are the first and greatest educators, and as such, offer much insight as to how one should teach.

3. Consider . . . the revelation of the light of the Name of God, the Educator. Behold, how in all things the evidences of such a revelation are manifest, how the betterment of all beings dependeth upon it. This education is of two kinds. The one is universal. Its influence pervadeth all things and sustaineth them. It is for this reason that God hath assumed the title, 'Lord of all worlds'. The other is confined them that have come under the shadow of this Name, and sought the shelter of this most mighty Revelation. They, however, that have failed to seek this shelter, have deprived themselves of this privilege, and are powerless to benefit from the spiritual sustenance that hath been sent down through the heavenly grace of this Most Great Name. How great the gulf fixed between the one and the other!

57. O true companions!

All humankind are as children in a school, and the Dawning-Points of Light, the Sources of divine revelation, are the teachers, wondrous and without peer. In the school of realities they educate these sons and daughters, according to teaching from God, and foster them in the bosom of grace, so that they may develop along every line, show forth the excellent gifts and blessings of the Lord, and combine human perfections; that they may advance in all aspects of human endeavor, whether outward or inward, hidden or visible, material or spiritual, until they make of this mortal world a wide-spread mirror, to reflect that other world which dieth not.

O ye friends of God! Because, in this most momentous of ages, the Sun of Truth hath risen at the highest point of the spring equinox, and cast its rays on every clime, it shall kindle such tremulous excitement, it shall release such vibrations in the world of being, it shall stimulate such growth and development, it shall stream out with such a glory of light, and clouds of grace shall pour down such plentiful waters, and fields and plains shall teem with such a galaxy of sweet-smelling plants and blooms, that this lowly earth will become the Abhá Kingdom, and this nether world the world above. Then will this fleck of dust be as the vast circle of the skies, this human place the palace-court of God, this spot of clay the day-spring of the endless favours of the Lord of Lords.

Wherefore, O loved ones of God! Make ye a mighty effort till you yourselves betoken this advancement and all these confirmations, and become focal centres of God's blessings, day-springs of the light of His unity, promoters of the gifts and graces of civilized life. Be ye in

that land vanguards of the perfections of humankind; carry forward the various branches of knowledge, be active and progressive in the field of inventions and the arts. Endeavor to rectify the conduct of men, and seek to excel the whole world in moral character. While the children are yet in their infancy feed them from the breast of heavenly grace, foster them in the cradle of all excellence, rear them in the embrace of bounty. Give them the advantage of every useful kind of knowledge. Let them share in every new and rare and wondrous craft and art. Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship. Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 102, pages 128-9)

Children as Pearls

Another metaphor is that of children as pearls and education as the shell. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says "Educate the children in the things of God; and, even as pearls, rear them in the heart of the shell of divine guidance." (62)

59. Among the greatest of all services that can possibly be rendered by man to Almighty God is the education and training of children, young plants of the Abhá Paradise, so that these children, fostered by grace in the way of salvation, growing like pearls of divine bounty in the shell of education, will one day bejewel the crown of abiding glory.

It is, however, very difficult to undertake this service, even harder to succeed in it. I hope that you will acquit yourself well in this most important of tasks, and successfully carry the day, and become an ensign of God's abounding grace; that these children, reared one and all in the holy Teachings, will develop natures like unto the sweet airs that blow across the gardens of the All-Glorious, and will waft their fragrance around the world.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 106, pages 133-4)

Parents as Teachers

We can see parents as teachers, or teachers as parents, as both analogies are helpful. Some differences between them involve varying levels of responsibility, concern, attention, emotional attachment and charges. 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls mothers the primary trainers of children and infants. Some of the more illuminating guidance given concerning education is to mothers. Children have the obligation of serving, obeying and honoring their parents, and parents have the responsibilities of caring for and educating their children. The wisdom and guidance given parents and families in the Bahá'í writings can be applied to teaching, classes and schools.

111. According to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, the family being a human unit must be educated according to the rules of sanctity. All the virtues must be taught the family. The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother, none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father likewise has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each the comfort of all; the honor of one the honor of all.

(The Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 168)

Teacher as Gardener

The teacher as a gardener is a frequently used metaphor throughout the Bahá'í writings.

50. 0 thou who gazest upon the Kingdom of God!

Thy letter was received and we note that thou art engaged in teaching the children of the believers, that these tender little ones have been learning The Hidden Words and the prayers and what it meaneth to be a Bahá'í.

The instruction of these children is even as the work of a loving gardener who tendeth his young plants in the flowering fields of the All-Glorious. There is no doubt that it will yield the desired results; especially is this true of instruction as to Bahá'í obligations and Bahá'í conduct, for the little children must needs be made aware in their very heart and soul that 'Bahá'í' is not just a name but a truth. Every child must be trained in the things of the spirit, so that he may embody all the virtues and become a source of glory to the Cause of God. Otherwise, the mere word 'Bahá'í,' if it yield no fruit, will come to nothing.

Strive then to the best of thine ability to let these children know that a Bahá'í is one who embodieth all the perfections, that he must shine out like a lighted taper—not be darkness upon darkness and yet bear the name 'Bahá'í.'

Name thou this school the Bahá'í Sunday School.*

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 123, page 143)

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*A Bahá'í children's class in Kenosha, Wisconsin, U.S.A.

55. 0 ye two well-loved handmaids of God! Whatever a man's tongue speaketh, that let him prove by his deeds. If he claimeth to be a believer, then let him act in accordance with the precepts of the Abhá Kingdom.

Praised be God, ye two have demonstrated the truth of your words by your deeds, and have won the confirmations of the Lord God. Every day at first light, ye gather the Bahá'í children together and teach them the communes and prayers. This is a most praiseworthy act, and bringeth joy to the children's hearts: that they should, at every morn, turn their faces toward the Kingdom and make mention of the Lord and praise His Name, and in the sweetest of voices, chant and recite.

These children are even as young plants, and teaching them the prayers is as letting the rain pour down upon them, that they may wax tender and fresh, and the soft breezes of the love of God may blow over them, making them to tremble with joy.

Blessedness awaiteth you, and a fair haven.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 115, page 139)

Metaphors about Students

Many analogies are found in the Bahá'í literature to help us understand human reality. People are compared to many different things that may help teachers better understand and teach them, such as talisman, mine, tree, steel, mirror, niche, lamp, night/day, animal/angel, book of creation, coal/diamond, plants, magnetized matter, branches, apprentices of God, physicians and awakeners.

4. Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess. Through a word proceeding out of the mouth of God he was

called into being; by one word more he was guided to recognize the Source of his education; by yet another word his station and destiny were safeguarded. The Great Being saith: Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXII, pages 258-9, 259-60)

9. Strain every nerve to acquire both inner and outer perfections, for the fruit of the human tree hath ever been and will ever be perfections both within and without. It is not desirable that a man be left without knowledge or skills, for he is then but a barren tree. Then, so much as capacity and capability allow, ye needs must deck the tree of being with fruits such as knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception and eloquent speech.

10. Man is even as steel, the essence of which is hidden: through admonition and explanation, good counsel and education, that essence will be brought to light. If, however, he be allowed to remain in his original condition, the corrosion of lusts and appetites will effectively destroy him.

30. 0 Company of God! To each created thing the Ancient Sovereignty hath portioned out its own perfection, its particular virtue and special excellence, so that each in its degree may become a symbol denoting the sublimity of the true Educator of humankind, and that each, even as a crystalline mirror, may tell of the grace and splendor of the Sun of Truth.

And from amongst all creatures He hath singled out man, to grant him His most wondrous gift, and hath made him to attain the bounties of the Company on high. That most precious of gifts is attainment unto His unfailing guidance, that the inner reality of humankind should become as a niche to hold this lamp; and when the scattering splendors of this light do beat against the bright glass of the heart, the heart's purity maketh the beams to blaze out even stronger than before, and to shine in glory on the minds and souls of men.

The attainment of the most great guidance is dependent upon knowledge and wisdom, and on being informed as to the mysteries of the Holy Words. Wherefore must the loved ones of God, be they young or old, be they men or women, each one according to his capabilities, strive to acquire the various branches of knowledge, and to increase his understanding of the mysteries of the Holy Books, and his skill in marshalling the divine proofs and evidences.

The eminent Sadru's-Sudur,**** who hath verily attained a most exalted station the Retreats of Bliss, inaugurated the teaching meeting. He was the first blessed soul to lay the foundation of this momentous institution. God be praised, during the course of his life he educated persons who today are strong and eloquent advocates of the Lord God, disciples who are indeed pure and spiritual descendants of him who was so close to the Holy Threshold. After his passing, certain blessed individuals took steps to perpetuate his teaching work, and when He learned of it, this Captive's heart rejoiced.

At this time, likewise, I most urgently request the friends of God to make every effort, as much as lieth within their competence, along these lines. The harder they strive to widen the scope of their knowledge, the better and more gratifying will be the result. Let the loved ones of God, whether young or old, whether male or female, each according to his capabilities, bestir themselves and spare no efforts to acquire the various current branches of knowledge, both spiritual and secular, and of the arts. Whensoever they gather in their meetings let their conversation be confined to learned subjects and to information on the knowledge and sciences of the day.

If they do thus, they will flood the world with the Manifest Light, and change this dusty earth into gardens of the Realm of Glory.

****A distinguished Persian believer who established the first classes from training Bahá'í teachers.

32. Man is in the highest degree of materiality, and at the beginning of spirituality—that is to say, he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection. He is at the last degree of darkness, and at the beginning of light; that is why it has been said that the condition of man is the end of the night and the beginning of day, meaning that he is the sum of all the degrees of imperfection, and that he possesses the degrees of perfection. He has the animal side as well as the angelic side, and the aim of an educator is to so train human souls that their angelic aspect may overcome their animal side.

(Some Answered Questions, page 218, 235)

33. Man is said to be the greatest representative of God, and he is the Book of Creation because all the mysteries of beings exist in him. If he comes under the shadow of the True Educator and is rightly trained, he becomes the essence of essences, the light of lights, the spirit of spirits; he becomes the centre of the divine appearances, the source of spiritual qualities, the rising-place of heavenly lights, and the receptacle of divine inspirations. If he is deprived of this education, he becomes the manifestation of satanic qualities, the sum of animal vices, and the source of all dark conditions.

The reason of the mission of the Prophets is to educate men, so that this piece of coal may become a diamond, and this fruitless tree may be engrafted and yield the sweetest, most delicious fruits. When man reaches the noblest state in the world of humanity, then he can make further progress in the conditions of perfection, but not in state; for such states are limited, but the divine perfections are endless.

(Some Answered Questions, page 219, 236-7)

75. O ye friends of God, the All-Merciful hath created humankind for the adornment of this contingent world, so that men may array the earth with the manifold blessings of Heaven; that the inner reality of the human being may, like unto a lamp of the spirit, cause the community of man to become as a mirror for the assemblage on high.

It is clear that learning is the greatest bestowal of God; that knowledge and the acquirement thereof is a blessing from Heaven. Thus is it incumbent upon the friends of God to exert such an effort and strive with such eagerness to promote divine knowledge, culture and the sciences, that ere long those who are school-children today will become the most erudite of all the fraternity of the wise. This is a service rendered unto God Himself, and it is one of His inescapable commandments.

Wherefore, O loving friends, strive with heart and soul and strength to make the Tarbíyat School a centre of enlightenment, and a well-spring of truth, that the children of God may shine with the rays of boundless learning, and that these tender plants of the divine garden may grow and flourish in the grace that showereth down from the clouds of knowledge and true understanding, and advance to such a degree as to astonish the company of those who know.

I swear by the bounty of God's wisdom that if they win this great prize, the members of the Tarbíyat School will be admitted to the assemblage of God, and that unto them, beyond a peradventure, the portals of His grace will open wide.

102. O ye dear children!

Your father is compassionate, clement and merciful unto you and desireth for you success, prosperity and eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Therefore, it is incumbent upon you, dear

children, to seek his good pleasure, to be guided by his guidance, to be drawn by the magnet of the love of God and be brought up in the lap of the love of God; that ye may become beautiful branches in the Garden of El-Abhá, verdant and watered by the abundance of the gift of God.

(Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbás, Vol. III, page 622)

105. O ye children of the Kingdom! Your letters with your photographs have been received. From the perusal of the letters the utmost heartfelt emotions were experienced and at the sight of the portraits a spiritual joy and gladness was felt. Praise be to God the letters were indicative of the turning of the faces toward the Kingdom and from those faces it was evident that the light of the love of God is manifest and resplendent upon the brows.

I pray to God that in this school on Sundays ye may acquire heavenly knowledge, ye may secure a training of merciful characteristics and that ye may advance from day to day so that each of you may become a peerless shrub in the Divine Rose-garden and may be adorned with full foliage, blossoms and fruits.

(From a Tablet to the children of the Bahá'í school, Urbana, Illinois, U.S.A.)

106. O young trees and plants, matchless and tender, that grow in the meadows of guidance! O ye newcomers to the Fraternity of Truth!

Although now ye be learners, the hope is that through showerings from the clouds of grace, ye will become teachers; that ye will flourish even as flowers and fragrant herbs in the garden of that knowledge which is both of the mind and of the heart; that each one of you will grow as a tree rich in yield, fair, fresh and strong, heavy with sweet fruit.

May the hidden confirmations of God make each one of you to become a wellspring of knowledge. May your hearts ever receive inspiration from the Denizens of the Concourse on high. May the drop become as the great sea; may the mote dazzle as the shining sun.

His Holiness the Báb hath said: 'Should a tiny ant desire in this day to be possessed of such power as to be able to unravel the abstrusest and most bewildering passages of the Qur'án, its wish will no doubt be fulfilled, inasmuch as the mystery of eternal might vibrates within the innermost being of all created things. If so helpless a creature can be endowed with so subtle a capacity, how much more efficacious must be the power released through the liberal effusions of the grace of Bahá'u'lláh! What confirmations will be garnered, what influxes of the heart!

Wherefore, O ye illumined youth, strive by night and by day to unravel the mysteries of the mind and spirit, and to grasp the secrets of the Day of God. Inform yourselves of the evidences that the Most Great Name hath dawned. Open your lips in praise. Adduce convincing arguments and proofs. Lead those who thirst to the fountain of life; grant ye true health to the ailing. Be ye apprentices of God; be ye physicians directed by God, and heal ye the sick among humankind. Bring those who have been excluded into the circle of intimate friends. Make the despairing to be filled with hope. Waken them that slumber; make the heedless mindful.

Such are the fruits of this earthly life. Such is the station of resplendent glory.

References

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